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The 27th Legislature
First Session

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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.

Wednesday, May 14, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the consul general for Japan in Calgary, Mr. Yasuo Minemura. Accompanying him is his wife, Mrs. Minemura, and vice-consul Ms Yukiko Kubayashi, consul for cultural affairs. The consul general just arrived from Tokyo to Calgary on April 18. It was a typical Alberta spring day. It was a blizzard. The consul general has noted, however, that if you do wait for 10 minutes, the weather changes, and is happy about that.

It was my pleasure to host the consul general and his delegation at luncheon earlier today to welcome him to Alberta. Japan is a very important trading partner for Alberta. Two-way trade between Alberta and Japan averages over \$3 billion per year. We appreciate very much that Japan has had a consulate in Alberta for 40 years. I'd like to pay tribute to the consulate for enhancing Alberta's relations with Japan and for its many valuable programs that bring Japanese business expertise, sports, and culture to Alberta. I would ask that our honoured guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some very special guests who are seated in your gallery. Our guests are all from Uganda. I would like to introduce, first of all, Mr. Sebagala Lartif Sengendo, who is a Member of Parliament for the Kawempe Division North, Kampala district. Our honoured guest comes to us with a background in education. He currently sits on the committees on defence and internal affairs and also the business community. Joining our honoured guest are a number of fellows: John Kaluma, Charles Afyo, Patrick Ssesanga, and our very own Muru Khamisiabditam. They are joining us here in Edmonton to attend a waste conference that was sponsored, I believe, by the city of Edmonton. As I said, the guests are all in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask them all to please rise and accept the very warm welcome of the Alberta Legislature.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members here 20 very bright and very energetic students from Donnan elementary school in my constituency. They are here today with their teacher,

Mrs. Erin Wilson. Each one of them is performing like an ambassador for their school, their city, their province, and their country. I'm very proud of them. I'm going to ask them to rise now and receive the very warm thank you and applause from our members. Please rise.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure today as well to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this House 27 very bright students from Rosemary school. That, by the way, is the school that I graduated from more than a number of years ago, so this is a privilege for me. They are accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Lenora Dyck and Mr. David Blumell and parents and accompanist Mrs. Cathy Peters, Mr. Ernie Plett, Mrs. Maggie Hale, Mrs. Sharon Zacharias, Mrs. Tonja Douglass, Mrs. Brenda Stimson, Mr. Gregg Pitcher, Mrs. Phyllis King, Mrs. Marina Petker, and Mrs. Donna McIntyre. I'm going to ask that group to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a total of about 30 individuals who came here today on this Cancer Day of Action to share their message that we can control cancer. As you know, this morning outside on the steps of the Legislature a group of cyclists arrived after a gruelling two-day ride from Calgary. They represent a united group of Alberta's cancer community with a targeted message to their elected MLAs, a message to make cancer control a public health priority.

Hundreds of thousands of Canadians are diagnosed with or die of cancer every year. It not only affects those with cancer but it affects their families, their friends, their colleagues, and their organizations that help them through the toughest battle of their lives. While Alberta does benefit from a comprehensive provincial cancer care and screening system, there's still work to be done. Up in the members' gallery we have the Cancer Day of Action team led by co-chairs Patti Morris and Erin Rayner and spokesperson Brian McGregor, who is also co-founder of Cancervive, and we have Kathleen Crowley, who was a presenter today at noon for us, and of course all the cyclists and dedicated volunteers that are here today. I ask that these individuals please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I have a second introduction today, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to introduce to you and through you one particular person from this Cancer Day of Action team. This individual I fell in love with some 25 years ago, and I fall more and more in love with her every day. She has battled day in and day out through a second bout of cancer, yet she continues to smile, and she continues to fight. Her attitude and determination to beat this disease is a true inspiration to me and to many others. She is the mother of my three daughters, and I love her dearly. I ask that my wife, Heather Webber, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to introduce to you and through you two special constituents of mine. I'm very happy that they made the trek here today. They left at 5:30 this morning from Athabasca to be here in time for the Premier's prayer breakfast. They've had a tour of the Leg. I was privileged to have lunch with them. Alma Swann was born in the Athabasca area. She is active in the aboriginal community, has a background in social

work, and is the native education co-ordinator at Edwin Parr composite school in Athabasca. With her is Bertha Clark, a mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and more, and I will tell you about the more in my member's statement coming up. I'd ask that they please rise and allow us to welcome them here in this Assembly.

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three members of the Alberta Justice team who are joining us this afternoon. Kerrie Carroll, Diane Nielsen, and Leanne Malcolm are participating in the Alberta Justice mentoring program, which gives departmental staff the opportunity to enhance their knowledge of Alberta Justice and to learn more about how our mandate fits with the overall system of governance in the province of Alberta. They'll be spending the afternoon here. I ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

I have another introduction as well, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I'm pleased today to have spent lunchtime with two of my constituents who were part of the Campaign to Control Cancer presentations that we received today. I'd like to introduce Mr. William Holt and Mr. Rae Morgan, who are long-standing members of our community in Calgary-Elbow, and to thank them for their service to the constituency.

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

Mr. Weadick: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two members of my constituency from Lethbridge and old friends. The first one is Mr. Scott Sakatch. He helped on my campaign, is a long-time newspaperman, and has recently embarked on an entrepreneurial business venture in the same field. The other is Alderman Shaun Ward, who I served nine years with on Lethbridge city council. He is in his sixth term representing the citizens of Lethbridge and is also in Edmonton for meetings. He is the vice-president of ASCHA, the Alberta seniors' housing association. I'd ask those gentlemen to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature Mr. Harold Perverseff, president of the Lethbridge Twinning Society. The Lethbridge Twinning Society is a nonprofit, grassroots citizens' organization dedicated to promote friendship and understanding between Lethbridge and twin cities. Currently Lethbridge is officially twinned with Culver City, California; Timashevsk in Russia; and Towada, Japan. I just met Mr. Perverseff at the luncheon with the consul general of Japan. I would like to ask Mr. Harold Perverseff to rise and receive the warm welcome from the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Cancer Day of Action

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cancer is a disease that continues to touch the lives of many Albertans. Whether it be a parent, brother, sister, or spouse, the sad fact is that cancer will

affect nearly all of us in ways both great and small. This year alone it is estimated that cancer-related illnesses will take the lives of more than 5,800 Albertans while more than 14,500 new cases will be diagnosed. Yet as with all things there is hope and the opportunity to turn inevitability into mere possibility. As is often the case, our best chance for success is to also . . . [applause] Thank you.

The simple fact is that raising awareness around prevention, early detection, and new and revolutionary forms of treatment helps us all to take control like never before. Today, May 14, is the Cancer Day of Action, and it is part of the national Campaign to Control Cancer, bringing together members of Canada's cancer community to remind us of the vital role that policy must play in our success against this disease. But success also relies on measurability, clear goals, measurable progress. Managed outcomes allow us to continue to provide all Albertans with access to the very best knowledge-based service and treatment options.

We need to continue to wage this battle that both science and compassion allow us to wage, to engage both the public and the private sectors to improve the quality of life of those who need it, and to help those who face this challenge feel less alone. For them and for ourselves we must always remember how far we have come and how far we have yet to go. To revive a phrase from past years, cancer can be beaten.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Redwater.

Bertha Clark

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a privilege to rise and speak about one of my constituents, a true Alberta pioneer and a leader who joins us in the Speaker's gallery today, Mrs. Bertha Clark. A recent recipient of the national aboriginal lifetime achievement award, Mrs. Clark has served as a leader of the Métis community and an advocate and role model for aboriginal women everywhere. Now 85 years old, she grew up in the depression era with 13 siblings. She now has nine children, 13 grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren.

During World War II at only 20 years of age she joined the Royal Canadian Air Force women's division and became a physical training and drill instructor. In the '60s she co-founded Alberta Native Women's Voices and became their first president. This organization blossomed into the Native Women's Association of Canada. Today the Native Women's Association of Canada is a vibrant organization that actively addresses issues important to First Nations and Métis women. In addition to being a circle of honour elder for the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, Mrs. Clark is still an active part of the community. She's a member of the Athabasca Heritage Society, the Athabasca Native Friendship Centre, the Métis local ad hoc housing committee, and a member of the Fort McMurray branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. She's been a member of the Métis judiciary and the Aboriginal Veterans Society and has championed causes for the underprivileged and disadvantaged all her life.

Since this Assembly last met, Mrs. Clark was invested as an officer of the Order of Canada, one of the highest honours a Canadian can receive. She is wearing that medal today. She was one of only two Albertans and one of 14 Canadians invested at her ceremony a few months ago. Today she is still a powerful voice and a guiding force for Canada's aboriginal community. I'd like to thank Mrs. Clark for the lifetime of work she has done for Alberta, Canada, and in particular Canada's aboriginal community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Crime Reduction and Safe Communities

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week my car was broken into while parked at my place in Edmonton. Personal belongings were stolen. Most people swear by their car alarms. This is quite ironic considering that whenever a car alarm is heard, it is not usually followed by: hey, someone's car is getting broken into; let's call the police. Car alarms are usually followed by someone shouting: will someone turn off that annoying car alarm? For me this event really emphasizes what I heard as I travelled the province as chair of the safer communities task force. This type of crime affects people personally: the feeling of being violated, the feeling of stress, the audacity of someone doing that, and many other emotions that go through your mind. What was frightening was learning that they are now stealing your vehicle registration for identity theft. It is scary to know that within hours you can lose your identity.

Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud this government for the steps that they are taking to reduce crime. The establishment of the crime reduction secretariat and the \$469 million that has been allotted over the next three years is encouraging. This incident underscores the need to build on progress that we have made and continue to be vigilant in preventing crime.

I want to thank everyone who helped me on that day. Edmonton Police Service Officer Gary Daugherty was terrific. Here at the Legislature the sheriffs, the security staff showed what big hearts they have. Lastly, a very special thanks to Tony Dasilva and commissionaire Wayne Markiw for taping my window so I could travel back to Calgary safely.

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

Access to the Alberta Legislature

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Legislature is the heart of Alberta's democracy. It has a long, proud history, one that citizens should be and are very proud of. Good laws have been made here along with a few bad ones but, thankfully, mostly good thanks to the work of dedicated MLAs and committed citizens. Democracy's greatest strength is the people and the people's ability to discuss the issues, form consensus, and elect representatives to carry out their will. Accordingly, the Legislature plays host not only to MLAs but all citizens. Through the services offered by this House, the people have direct access to democracy.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, not all Albertans have ideal access to their Legislature. Albertans with disabilities are still at a disadvantage when it comes to using this fine building. Great strides have been made, to be sure, but consider that Albertans with limited mobility must use the side entrance to gain access. Surely all Albertans should be able to enter the Legislature with dignity and pride through the front door. Or consider the needs of Albertans with hearing impairments. I believe that CART systems should be installed in the galleries and public boardrooms so that those Albertans will be able to follow debates and participate, as citizens are intended to, on public committees. I hope we'll see these important interpretive tools in use here in the House sooner rather than later.

I realize that no one in this House has deliberately tried to limit access to Albertans with disabilities. Indeed, I congratulate and thank all members and Legislature staff, past and present, who have worked hard to make the Legislature more accessible. But I believe that a few small improvements could make a big difference to a lot of Albertans. This government plans to renovate the Legislature Grounds. May I suggest that front door accessibility for Albertans

with disabilities would be an excellent way to show this government's commitment to respect their dignity. We have marvellous engineers in this province, and I'm sure we can come up with a way to incorporate a ramp into the Legislature's design, preserving the building's esthetic heritage while recognizing modern needs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Health System Restructuring

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night during the debate over Ministry of Health and Wellness estimates the minister admitted that no evaluation has been done of the impact of 15 years of restructuring on the health system in Alberta. In that time the system has been completely restructured three separate times. The nine health regions are still struggling to fully integrate the parts they inherited from the last restructuring five years ago, and now he wants to do it again. To the minister: what evidence does the minister have that this next round of rightsizing is going to improve patient care and access to that care?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, first of all, let's put on the record that the care that Albertans receive in this province through our health care system is absolutely first-rate. I'm sure that any one of us who sought election on the 3rd of March heard on the doorsteps that the frustration came around the accessibility to the system, also concern about the future sustainability of the system. Those are the issues that we will be addressing over the coming days and weeks relative to what is the right governance model to ensure we have an efficient, effective service going forward.

Mr. Taylor: To the same minister, who, I guess, is keeping the evidence locked away in a closet for another little while or so. Medicine works way better when it's evidence-based than when it's based on spidey sense. What is the minister going to put into place to evaluate this next reorganization so that we can tell for sure whether it worked?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, part of our discussions around what the new governance model is going to look like clearly also will include performance measurements and accountability contracts. So I would just ask the member to wait for our caucus decision, and then I'd be happy to discuss it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How is this minister going to explain this fourth restructuring to the front-line workers who have endured the unending stress of the last three times this government rearranged the deck chairs on the *Titanic* instead of turning the wheel to avoid the iceberg?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the front-line workers that I've spoken to are for the most part supportive of what we are attempting to do, and that is to streamline the system and make it more effective and ensure that the patients' experience with the health system continues to be at a high level. Front-line workers are no more happy with telling patients that they don't have accessibility than we are. That's what we were looking to fix.

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

Role of Opposition Parties

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm an Albertan by choice, which I'm sure just makes the Premier's teeth itch. You know, you just can't go around accusing people of degrading Alberta when they exercise their free speech rights and their duty as members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to question this guy about yet another cockamamie misuse of Albertans' tax dollars. Yesterday he called the opposition "subversive" for no other reason than that we dared to disagree with him. To the Premier: are we to take from that that the Premier believes that the 449,423 Albertans who voted for someone other than the PCs last March are all subversive as well?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I could have predicted this question today because yesterday one of the reporters from the *Edmonton Journal* was scurrying around and interviewing people, et cetera, about the comments I made. I said yesterday that "the role of the opposition in a democratic government is very important, but it's not to be subversive." I remember when the former Speaker of the Assembly, Mr. Stan Schumacher, and the former leader of the Alberta Liberals, a person that we all had tremendous respect for – God rest him in eternal peace – said to me that the role of the opposition is not to be subversive; it's to present policy alternatives. That's where I'm coming from.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, does the Premier understand that as much as he might wish it otherwise, parliamentary democracy involves more than one party? Does he realize how deeply offensive his remarks in this House yesterday were?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, getting on the offensive, I can tell you that there are, I think, two major cities in Alberta that are offended this morning. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar yesterday was questioning me with respect to the portrait gallery: "Is the Premier's office involved in this \$40 million budget amount, and what will happen to this money if neither Calgary nor Edmonton are successful?" Remember, both cities applied to the federal government for support for a portrait gallery. Both cities are very proud of the application. The member then says, "Where will this \$40 million go? Will it go to another propaganda campaign?" Since when are the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary delivering propaganda?

Mr. Taylor: It's not enough, Mr. Speaker, that he calls the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar subversive and degrading, now he twists his words as well.

To the Premier: will he apologize and withdraw his remarks?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, you've known me for many years. I stand by my word, and if I say the truth, I stick to it. It's the truth. It's right here in print, and you can see it.

Vehicle Seizures

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, recently I asked a question about instituting a pilot project aimed to curb gang violence on Hobbema, and, boom, it happens. Yesterday I asked to impose minimum drink prices, and, boom, it's happening. Since we're on a roll, I will ask for something else for Alberta citizens. The Solicitor General can take it easy; I will not ask him to take away anyone's car carrying AK-47s. Will

the Solicitor General bring forward legislation allowing the police to seize vehicles of individuals possessing illegal amounts of drugs?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, there's already legislation under the Criminal Code of Canada which allows us to do that, and we do do that when the circumstances allow us to.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I'm not so certain about that, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Police Association recently advocated for making this crime reduction strategy. Since they're advocating for it, I would take some issue with the Solicitor General's comments and ask him if he will be seizing vehicles used in this drug type of trafficking and inform the police officers, if it is there, to take action in this manner.

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, there are conditions under the Criminal Code now that allow us to do that; however, we do know that there are illegal weapons and illegal drugs that travel up and down our highways. So any legislation that we can bring in in this province, I will certainly review it. I'm sure that we will make our communities much safer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that answer. With that answer, when can we expect this type of legislation to be on the books here in Alberta to ensure citizens' safety?

Mr. Lindsay: As indicated, Mr. Speaker, we constantly review the legislation we have to ensure the safety of Albertans. I certainly don't have a timeline for when we will bring forward new legislation, but we are reviewing something in regard to the proceeds of crime legislation at this point in time, and we'll bring it forward when it's appropriate.

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

2:00

Support for Child Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's child care policy announced on Friday continues to leave most Alberta families behind. While Manitoba families get child care for less than \$500 per month, Alberta families will pay fees as much as \$1,200. The minister has implemented a policy of subsidies, but a one-child family with an income of \$60,000, well below the provincial average of family incomes, will get no help at all and will continue to pay sky-high rates. A policy question to the minister of children's services: why is it the policy of this government that average families in Alberta must pay double what Manitoba families do for child care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to say that I don't think after last Friday's announcement that we have left anybody behind. We announced \$242 million over the next three years to increase spaces. We are tackling accessibility, affordability as well as staff retention, so I disagree with her premise for that question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that StatsCan

shows the median family income in Alberta to be about \$77,000, the average family income to be closer to \$94,000, why doesn't the government's policy include recognition of the need to bring daycare costs down for the overwhelming number of families that don't meet their income thresholds?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we did introduce new subsidies that extended to parents of children going to out-of-school, which is new, the first time. We also increased subsidies for parents using the zero to six. But, as well, we have a whole variety of initiatives that are going to bring down the operating costs of child care, and hopefully we're going to impact everybody's affordability.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, notwithstanding the minister's previous indication to the Assembly that we should wait and see what the government comes up with to create new spaces, isn't it true that parents will still be required to shoulder about two-thirds of the start-up costs through the current plan with start-up fees?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, the premise of this announcement that we made on Friday is a plan that is based on parental choice. The bottom line here is that parents across the province do pay for the majority of the costs of child care outside of those that fall beneath our subsidies. The plan was based on consultation, on what we heard from our stakeholders, and Albertans do believe that we help those that need the help most.

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

Beef Recovery Strategies

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents are beef producers. Right now they're facing some very challenging times: the high costs of feed, fuel, and fertilizer not to mention the weak U.S. dollar. It's more and more difficult to make ends meet for them, and they've been asking me: when are we going to see some relief? My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Considering the current state of the beef industry, can producers expect more financial assistance from the government of Alberta in the near future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The farm recovery plan provided \$165 million to help out our producers. I'm pleased to announce that all \$165 million has now been paid out in this year. This was intended, of course, for one-time, short-term transitional assistance. We recognize the challenge facing all livestock producers today, and we continue to work with them to develop some long-term solutions.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the same minister tell me what the government is doing to open up new markets for Alberta beef?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we

continue to work at strengthening our trade opportunities. In fact, the Premier and I had some valuable discussions in Washington earlier this year at the ag summit in January and during my Asian mission last fall. At recent meetings in Geneva I encouraged our WTO partners to eliminate the domestic subsidies and create trade access and, certainly, to respect the trade rules out there. I met with government representatives from many of our important trading parties.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. In the past he's committed to helping reduce the regulatory burden on our beef producers. Can the minister tell us what progress has been made on this front?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, I stand by my commitment. This is one of the issues that the competitive initiative has been directed to examine, of course. The Alberta government will do everything it can to create a better business environment for the agricultural producers out there, but this is a national issue and will require a national solution. We continue to press the federal government to reduce the regulatory burden on our producers. This is something that will definitely be on the agenda when I meet with my federal-provincial counterparts later this month in Toronto.

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

Policing in Provincial Parks

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Due to drastic conservation officer and field office cutbacks over the past 14 years, officer ranks have been so depleted that they are unable to provide proper information, support, and enforcement services in Alberta's parks. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation: how many conservation officers backed by RCMP and sheriffs will be out this weekend to inform, support, and protect outdoor enthusiasts in Alberta's 500-plus provincial parks and protected areas?

Mr. Speaker, if I could potentially redirect it to the Solicitor General, he might have that information for me.

Mr. Lindsay: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'll have to take that under advisement. I am not briefed on it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. After evaluating the enforcement challenges experienced in Alberta's parks this long weekend, will the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and the Solicitor General consider extending the liquor ban to include more parks or at least consider hiring more seasonal conservation officers? Again I guess I'll go to the Solicitor General.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The liquor bans in the parks have already been set, and they've been advertised, and we're not looking at extending them at this particular time. In regard to extra patrols to ensure the safety of the park users, we've already, again, got a plan in place to look after that, and we're quite confident that the plans will ensure that our parks this weekend are a good place for all families to enjoy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again I'm required to go to the Solicitor General. Given communications difficulties and large numbers of potentially unruly campers this long weekend, will the minister consider deployment on a two officer to one vehicle ratio during the increasingly challenging graveyard shift hours?

Mr. Lindsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, depending on the situation in the parks, whether it requires the assistance of a police officer or not, in some cases we do have two officers or two conservation officers in a vehicle, and again the conditions at that particular time will dictate how we respond.

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

Seniors' Benefit Programs

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 21 of this year in reply to a question the hon. minister of seniors said, "We find that seniors are happier to age in place, to stay in their homes as long as possible." My question is to the hon. minister. Would the minister undertake to discuss with her colleagues the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Municipal Affairs the possibility of eliminating or phasing out the education portion of the property taxes for at least low-income seniors so they may age in place?

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly support the aging in place concept as I know that seniors are happier in their own homes. The government views education as a provincial responsibility shared by all Alberta residents. Through the education property tax assistance program we've helped more than 60,000 seniors' households. That was last year, and that was by providing a rebate for increases in the education portion of the property tax, and there are municipalities like Edmonton, Calgary, and the county of Strathcona that also have a tax assistance program for seniors.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: would the minister of seniors undertake to review the dental and optical benefits that seniors are receiving and provide them with more than the basic coverage so that they may age in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have two very good programs in place to assist seniors with their dental and prescription eyeglass expenses. Through the dental and optical assistance for seniors' programs low- and moderate-income seniors can receive up to \$5,000 in dental work every five years and up to \$230 every three years for prescription eyeglasses. More than 245,000 seniors are eligible for benefits from these programs, which are available to single seniors with incomes of \$31,000 and senior couples with a combined income of \$62,000.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: would the minister undertake to review the Aids to Daily Living benefits received by seniors so they may age in place?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Aids to Daily Living program provides important supports to assist Albertans of all ages, including those with long-term disabilities, chronic illnesses, and terminal illnesses, to remain in their own homes in their community. This program helps nearly 80,000 Albertans, including seniors, each year to purchase items such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, oxygen supplies, and these allow them to remain in their homes as long as possible. Low-income Albertans, or 66 per cent of our clients, do not pay the cost-share portion. This means they are not required to pay any amount towards Aids to Daily Living.

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

2:10

Highway 55

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been brought to our attention that on highway 55 from La Corey west to Iron River the high traffic volume and narrow surface of the highway are a serious concern. There's heavy oil patch traffic on the road, and it is in poor condition. A service rig rollover on the highway cost nearly \$1 million, something which could have been prevented if the highway was wider. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. Why hasn't the government addressed the poor condition on this highway?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

The Speaker: Hon. member, this afternoon in less than an hour from now the estimates of the Department of Transportation will be the whole purview for two and a half hours. Our custom is that when such estimates are before the House, questions are not directed on that subject in the question period on that day.

Mr. Kang: Sir, it's a policy question. It's not a money question.

The Speaker: Well, sir, you know, I've been building roads for a long time. Sorry; that didn't sound very policy to me, with due respect. If you have an additional question, proceed.

Highway 55

(continued)

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the poor condition of the road creates significant obstacles for the ability of emergency vehicles to get to their destinations in the shortest time possible and that the state of this highway has been poor for some time now, can the minister offer a timeline as to when this road will be improved?

The Speaker: I'm afraid the same ruling will apply. That's very specific on a particular road that is part of the estimates.

The third question if you have one, sir.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering the poor condition of this section of highway 55, particularly in the winter months, does the minister believe that the privatized road maintenance has been doing an adequate job at keeping this highway safe and well maintained?

The Speaker: And we now have it on the record, and the same policy applies.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay.

Medications for Mental Health Treatment

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The science of medicine is inextricably linked to the discipline of pharmacology and the successful treatment of patients through drugs and drug therapies. Recognizing that this government is committed to improving access to health care, my first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why are drugs approved by the common drug review, which means those drugs are legal to be prescribed in Canada, not necessarily approved at the provincial level?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that Health Canada does assess the safety and efficacy of drugs and then grants approval for their use in Canada. The common drug review makes recommendations to participating government drug programs regarding the clinical- and cost-effectiveness. Then in Alberta we have arm's length from government the expert panel that also reviews the drugs. We don't necessarily have all drugs approved because we take into account such things as their role in therapy and costs.

Ms Woo-Paw: My first supplemental is to the same minister. What is the provincial government doing to effectively address the current medication needs of Albertans suffering from mental illnesses?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that medications are critical to supporting Albertans with mental illness, but there is more that we need to do. As part of our pharmaceutical strategy that we've promised to deliver over the next few months, we will be ensuring that mental illness drugs are taken into account.

I think also that the member was not in the 26th Legislature and may not be aware, but one of the amendments that we approved to the Mental Health Act was the community treatment orders, and that was another area to deal with the mental health patient, ensuring that the drugs that are prescribed are in fact taken.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Albertans suffering from mental illnesses often have problems meeting their medication needs. This can affect their quality of life and indirectly impact our province's human resources and productivity. Is the minister of health investigating projected accessibility issues for the mentally ill?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, we did have a good discussion on that last night during our estimates, and I did mention that one of the action items in our health plan will be to bring forward a children's mental health strategy. I think it's important that we ensure that at a very young age mental health is identified and treated. In addition to that, as you're well aware, our particular department has a \$29 million commitment as part of the safe communities task force, that was chaired by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. There were a number of recommendations in that task force that we're now funding around mental health treatment beds.

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

Women's Equality

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On average women in Alberta earn only 70 per cent of what men make, or about \$15,000 less per year. Studies have shown that by increasing female employment levels, you also increase GDP, so this is as much about economics as it is about equality. My question is to the minister of finance. What plans does the minister have to address the fact that the average income for a woman in Alberta is 30 per cent less than what a man earns?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, in my previous portfolio I had an opportunity to look at many of those statistics that related to the status of women, and I've noted recently, while we're looking at the investment and savings strategy, that a higher percentage of Albertans do not have pension plans, compared to the other provinces. So I'm actually gathering some information because I want to design something that will help attack this issue from a number of points of view, both in long-term savings and also in those dollars for take-home pay, that are today's issue.

Ms Blakeman: That's a good move.

To the same minister. As many women must choose to work in lower paying part-time jobs in order to care for their children, what can this minister do to help mothers who want to continue their careers and stay in the workforce and be responsible to their children at the same time?

Ms Evans: Well, indeed, the number of programs across a number of other ministries actually do that sort of thing. Since I've been in government, I've been trying very hard to get people in the departments that I've been a part of to look very favourably at job sharing and also working from home, but as Finance and Enterprise minister we're always looking out for other best practices so that we can enable people that come here to make valued contributions to the workforce. Many take lower paying jobs, but fortunately one of my pleasant discoveries is that many women in Alberta are leading corporations or providing outstanding entrepreneurship, are leading companies that have more than a billion dollars in profits a year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. The next question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Since all of the issues that would be captured by the phrase "women's issues" are lumped under this minister's portfolio now, that work being done by one single person in the department, can the minister explain why more is not being done to improve the labour shortage in our province by increasing the number of women in the workforce?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I do acknowledge the fact that Alberta's tight labour market is an ongoing challenge for employers in the province. We have various initiatives to include more Albertans to participate in the workforce, including working with women in Alberta as well as those that are facing disabilities, more senior-type workers, and those individuals from the aboriginal communities. So they are part of our discussion and part of our plans to see how we can incorporate their activities in the workforce at a greater level.

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

Water Quality in Fort Chipewyan Area

Ms Notley: Thank you. Last week representatives of Suncor travelled to meet the people of the Fort Chipewyan First Nation to explain why Suncor sewage was released into the Athabasca River. Not surprisingly, those representatives arrived at the meeting with their own bottled water as there is no safe drinking water in Fort Chip. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: in the interests of representing aboriginal communities, will you commit today to release copies of all studies and reports in the possession of your ministry that relate to the health and water safety of the Chipewyan and Mikisew?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I was in Fort Chip myself on Friday, and I met with the two chiefs there as well as with the local Métis organization. We discussed these very issues, and I also have asked for some of the reports that the hon. member is referring to. As soon as I receive them, I'll figure out what to do with them.

2:20

Ms Notley: Well, I'd feel better if you would commit to making those reports public.

Given that it's unlikely that the Chipewyan and Mikisew will be featured in the \$25 million PR campaign on the tar sands, wouldn't your mandate be better served by advocating for a reallocation of that fund to support a study of the toxins affecting the Chipewyan and Mikisew?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I gave a commitment to the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation band as I did to the Mikisew Cree band and to the local Métis organization No. 125 that I would review all the matters pertaining to the issues they raised and brought to my attention, not the least of which is some of the problems at the delta, right where the majority of these people in the Fort Chip area live. As soon as we have the rest of that information together, I'll see what I can do from my ministry's perspective and working with other ministries that are also involved as well as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to move this issue along in a productive way.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, once again, I do hope you choose to release that information once you've reviewed it.

To the minister of health: given that a toxicology study would show once and for all if there is a higher than average level of toxins in the people in this region, will the minister acknowledge that such a study would be the most honest and transparent way to determine the extent of the health crisis in the area and commit today that he will fund it accordingly?

Mr. Liepert: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to acknowledge that there's a health crisis in the area. I will say that the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and I have been having discussions as to what, if any, action needs to be taken, and we will report accordingly.

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

Impact of Gasoline Prices on Tourism

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fuel prices are at an all-time high, and businesses across the province that depend on tourism are concerned about the impact on visitation. My first question is to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Should operators expect a serious downturn in Alberta tourism this year despite earlier optimistic expectations because of the higher than expected gasoline costs?

Mrs. Ady: Well, Mr. Speaker, transportation costs are a part of any planning for any vacation. Albertans generally pay less for gasoline than other Canadians, and we find that about 50 per cent of all tourists in Alberta, actually, are Albertans. So we're excited about that. That's why we've started the new Stay campaign, and we're encouraging Albertans to vacation closer to home. We have so much to offer.

Interestingly enough, a media poll yesterday showed that 43 per cent of Albertans who responded weren't going to change their plans because of gasoline prices, and 29 per cent were planning to travel around Alberta. We think that's good news.

Mr. Rodney: To the same minister. Despite the current gas prices I do expect that our parks will be popular this weekend, weather permitting, of course. I'm wondering what the minister's department is doing to ensure that these park visitors are indeed safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that there was an earlier question about whether our conservation officers would be out there. We'll have 150 conservation officers out in our parks this weekend. It is the long weekend, and there's a lot of enthusiasm out there. We have seven liquor bans on this weekend. If we need to extend those programs, we'll look at them and see what happens after the weekend.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Heritage sites and museums across the province rely heavily on the customary heavy summer traffic starting this weekend. I'm wondering and I've had a number of calls on this: what are facilities doing to counteract the threatened lack of numbers due to high gas prices, and what is the minister's department doing to assist in their endeavours?

Mr. Blakett: Mr. Speaker, our 17 historic sites, interpretive centres, and museums are gearing up for a busy summer season. They've got new exhibits, activities, and programs. They give us a window into our history and tell the great story of individuals and communities that built this great province. There are new exhibits: the new dragon exhibit at the Royal Alberta Museum. There is the soon-to-be renovated Frank Slide Interpretive Centre and the historic clay district in Medicine Hat, which I had the privilege of visiting last Friday. I'm going to go to as many of these particular locations as I can with my family this summer, and I encourage all my colleagues to take their kids and grandchildren and do the same.

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

Farm Worker Safety

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian agriculture injury surveillance program reported 274 children killed on farms in Canada in the period 1990 to 2003, roughly two children per month. Without farm worker regulations in Alberta there's currently no age limit or work restrictions for children working in agricultural operations. The injury rate in children is twice that of the overall population. In fact, in Alberta a third of fatalities are children or youth. My first question is to the children's minister. Since children cannot refuse unsafe work, will this minister stand up for children and work towards farm safety legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will defer to the minister responsible for child and work legislation.
Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: since even workers' compensation coverage is not mandatory for farm workers, there's no compensation for time off or lost body functions in Alberta, and in many cases workers cannot afford to take time off to recover and continue working at further risk to their health and safety, will this government take measures to at least make workers' compensation available to all farm workers?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member should know that farm employers may apply to have voluntary workers' compensation coverage for their farm workers if they choose. So that service is there, and there are actually a great number of farm families that take advantage of that particular service that's out there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Mr. Minister, without workers' compensation, since it is optional for farmers, as the minister has said, this leaves farmers open to litigation of hundreds of thousands of dollars for preventable injury and death. Would you tell this House if your resistance to basic workers' rights, including mandatory workers' compensation, is serving the farming community well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague was absolutely right; it's available to farm workers if they want it.

I'd like to just go back to his first question a little bit. Farm children don't work on the farm; they're there. To stretch this into these children working on the farm is a real stretch.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently my office has received claims of funding discrepancies between educational institutions in Edmonton and Calgary. My own research has shown

that in 2006-07 Calgary institutions received \$232 million less than Edmonton in noncapital postsecondary funding. Per student, specifically, the University of Calgary receives more than \$1,000 less per student than the University of Alberta. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: what's the reason for this discrepancy?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the reason is that different program deliveries cost different amounts of money. Different numbers of students in different programs will necessitate the institutions requesting in their base grants a higher level of funding because of the funding formula that we have through the base granting process. So comparing grants from one institution to another based simply on total dollars and the full load equivalent of students really is apples to oranges because a medical student will cost a lot more to train than perhaps a business administration student.

Mr. Denis: Mr. Speaker, I agree it's apples to oranges because in Calgary our population is increasing faster.

My supplementary question is: when can we expect this formula to be reviewed?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we're working on several aspects of the funding formula right now through the roles and mandates framework process that we had last year. We have a working group on the funding framework, and in that funding framework we're concentrating on collaboration, co-operation opportunities between the institutions. But that will not change the concept that a more expensive program of delivery will necessitate additional resources to that delivery institution over one that costs less.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Unpaid Wages

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Employment Standards Code does not allow violations going back further than six months to be investigated. This rule applies to everyone subject to the code, including temporary foreign workers. My first question is to the minister in charge of Alberta labour. If a worker has been cheated out of their pay for over a year, why can they claim for lost wages through an investigation by the employment standards office that goes back for only the previous six months?

2:30

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any incidents or cases of that happening. You know, I recognize that it's important to make sure that all employees are paid on time. There are times when individual companies may declare bankruptcy and some of the wages don't follow through, or there might be disputes at times in terms of hours worked. The reason why we've got individuals is to help resolve those particular conflicts. I'm not aware of any that go beyond the six months.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I am.

Again to the same minister: given that there were over 4,100 registered complaints last year, will this government finally get tough on cheating employers and expand the window from six months back to 12 months? It's only fair. If the workers have been cheated for six months or for a full year, they should get all the money that is owed them. It's only fair.

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, we're always reviewing, and we're currently reviewing the Employment Standards Code. We recognize that this is very, very important both for Alberta's employees themselves and the employers. We want to make sure that these things are done right. We want to make sure that Albertans, as I indicated, both employers and employees, are treated fairly in this. We will continue to review it and bring improvements where they're needed.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. There's a guide for temporary foreign workers on the Alberta Employment and Immigration website which indicates how the Employment Standards Code works. Why is it not listed in this report that if a temporary foreign worker is cheated by an employer, they can only go back six months and not a full year or a full two years like the temporary foreign worker visa that is issued by the federal government?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure why it's not there, but suffice it to say that we do have a hotline that's available to our temporary foreign workers. We have various offices across the province – one in Calgary, one in Edmonton – to be able to deal with some of the issues. I'll have to look and see as to why it's not in the booklet and certainly would recognize the importance of maybe putting it in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Technology Commercialization

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 9 the Precarn-Alberta initiative was announced. This initiative brings together various partners to undertake high-risk research on technical challenges associated with new market opportunities. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Alberta has a long history of bringing along technology and innovation so that it is economical. Why this initiative, and why now?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House the Premier was talking about the vision of the next generation economy and where we need to go. He has asked me as part of my mandate letter to speed up the pace of bringing technology to market. What the Precarn announcement will do, with about \$1.2 million from our contribution, is it will help those companies determine how well their products are going to work in a customer setting and may even lead to the first sale, we're hopeful. That will allow investors to complete their due diligence on those potential venture capital investments and allow the companies to better enable their precommercialization.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental to the same minister. Alberta already has many stakeholder groups supporting high-tech entrepreneurs. Why does Alberta need another one?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we already have support agencies to help ICT companies – that's true – to do research, to do the development, and to get the financing, but this really is the first agency that will actually help do the field testing for these companies. The Precarn initiative is the start of a new ICT business support community as part of the overall package of commercialization that we're launching this year. It ties in very nicely with some of the other things that we're doing. This approach is working very

well in the ICT sectors, and we're looking for ways to offer it in other sectors as well.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, my final supplemental question to the same minister: why is it important to support this sector?

Mr. Horner: Well, this sector, Mr. Speaker, is somewhat of a platform technology. It applies to all industry sectors. We are looking at focusing on several key initiatives that Alberta has strength in. That would be forestry, agriculture, energy, life sciences, the ICT, and, of course, nanotechnology, which is also a platform technology. In order to help those platform technologies move forward, they have to be tested, and they have to be moved forward in those products. We could see, potentially, items that would monitor traffic patterns or vital signs from patients, adjust the temperature of your furnace, many other interesting items.

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

Emergency Preparedness

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The environment is on everyone's mind given the incident at the Aurora tar sands tailings pond and a pipeline rupture spilling oil into a body of water. After the Wabamun incident in 2005 the province's Environmental Protection Commission recommended certain actions to deal with environmental disasters. Now more than ever we have to be sure those recommendations are being followed and not ignored. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister explain why the Alberta emergency plan has not been updated? It's the same plan effective as of November 6, 2000. Shouldn't this plan be changed following the Wabamun recommendations . . .

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency was brought forward as an entity last year and has been formed as an agency for exactly that reason: that in case there are emergencies, in case there is a disaster, Alberta is prepared.

Ms Pastoor: I'm assuming that you're in the middle of updating this. That would be my question: this is being updated?

Mr. Danyluk: Mr. Speaker, we look at different directions and different focuses that need to be looked at, and we are continually updating the needs as Alberta grows and progresses.

Ms Pastoor: To the same minister: can the minister tell us what support his ministry provides to municipalities to develop and maintain their emergency response plans? The province has the resources, so the province should be providing a high level of support and leadership to cities and towns for these vital plans.

Mr. Danyluk: I'm very glad to hear the member of the opposition talk about what we do because that's exactly what we do. Alberta Emergency Management supports municipalities. It helps municipalities in the education and the training of their members, making sure that in case of a disaster or in case of an emergency Alberta is prepared, that communities are prepared, that we have the co-ordination and co-operation between front-line workers, search and

rescue, firefighters, municipalities, that we have a co-ordinated effort towards keeping Alberta safe.

Technology Commercialization

(continued)

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government recently announced joint funding with Western Economic Diversification projects in China. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology: how do these partnerships fit in with AET strategy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, the mandate from the Premier is to enhance our environment for commercialization. Certainly, the Chinese marketplace is a huge opportunity for Alberta companies. There are a number of technology innovations that are happening in China. Not only do we want to commercialize technology from research that we've developed here, but we also want to partner with research institutions around the globe and perhaps bring that technology here and commercialize their technology here. By partnering with the federal government and Alberta International and Intergovernmental Relations, the ministry is trying to gain maximum value for our partners and our companies and our participants.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental question to the same minister: what can Albertans expect as outcomes?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's our firm hope that we would have agreements in place from these partnering opportunities. China is, of course, Alberta's second-largest trading partner, next to the United States, and like Alberta, as I said, it is an emerging technology commercialization centre. By marrying their world-class research centres with our world-class research centres, by marrying commercialization centres over there with ours, by way of memorandums of understanding, by working with them for their marketplace to develop those commercialization opportunities . . .

Mr. Quest: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental question is for the same minister. Why are we pursuing sending companies to China and not improving our local business climate?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing in a global climate, a global business environment, and certainly technology has made that global environment much closer to home. I think it's important that we recognize where our customers will be. I think it's important that we not hide from the influence of globalization, that we work together in partnership with these other areas or other jurisdictions, China being just one. It's important to note that many of the plans that we have laid out in front of this House, like the Alberta Enterprise Corporation Act, or others are about creating that environment here at home.

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

2:40

Home Renovation Contractors

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Construction is booming in Alberta. Contractors are very busy. This has brought some less than reputable renovators out of the woodwork. We're already hearing of homeowners, especially seniors, getting ripped off by unscrupulous renovation contractors, and some Albertans have lost

tens of thousands of dollars. My questions are for the Minister of Service Alberta. What can these vulnerable consumers do to protect themselves from these rip-off artists?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think most Alberta contractors are honest and hard working, but there are some disreputable renovators who try to make a fast buck at someone else's expense. The best way for homeowners to protect themselves is to do some homework, ask lots of questions. Ask friends or neighbours: have they had similar work done, and were they happy with the work and price? Consumers can also contact their local home builders' association for a list of professional contractors and the Better Business Bureau about a company's complaint history.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. My first supplemental is for the same minister. Minister, what are the warning signs that might alert a homeowner that their contractor is not on the up and up and may be taking advantage of them?

The Speaker: Now, I'm not sure that has anything to do with government policy.

The third question.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also for the Minister of Service Alberta. What can my constituents do if they are experiencing problems with a contractor and believe he may be a crook?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, things can go wrong no matter how much care has been taken in selecting a contractor or preparing a contract. If a job was misrepresented or the supplier defaulted on a prepaid contract, the consumer can contact my department. We can and do investigate and charge contractors for violating the Fair Trading Act. Finally, most disagreements can be settled through discussion and agreement.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 107 questions and answers and a bit of juxtaposition along the way.

In 30 seconds from now I'll call on the remaining two members to participate in Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Emergency Preparedness Week

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge Emergency Preparedness Week, May 4 to 10. I believe all individuals in our city and province can benefit from a lesson in preparation. I addressed this Assembly on May 5, during NAOSH Week, regarding the importance of health and safety in our workplaces.

While it is important for Albertans to improve the safety of our workplaces, it is just as essential that our homes be subject to these same standards of safety and preparedness. As Alberta advances and continues to grow, it becomes increasingly important for us to

continually improve our methods of preparation in order to ensure that individuals have the highest level of safety possible.

Emergency Preparedness Week aims to educate individuals on the importance of being ready for any major emergency or disaster. People are given the knowledge and practical advice to sustain themselves within their homes for 72 hours, long enough for crews to focus on specific areas of need.

On Saturday, May 10, I attended an event hosted by the office of emergency preparedness held in Hawrelak park. The office of emergency preparedness was joined by various other front-line response teams such as the Edmonton Police Service, emergency medical and fire, Capital health, EPCOR, ATCO, the RCMP, Salvation Army, SRD, the federal Department of the Environment, search and rescue, and others.

The key message spread by these organizations was for individuals and families to get their ducks in a row. They had demonstrations on the equipment that is utilized during emergencies as well as various other activities that aided and spread their message of preparation. If a disaster were to strike, it is crucial that all affected be prepared and properly trained on their role in the aftermath. Crisis areas will be the priority of emergency crews. Therefore, it is helpful if other residential areas are equipped with the tools needed to sustain themselves for several days until help can arrive.

As a former volunteer firefighter I recognize and appreciate the efforts of those who run towards emergencies while the rest run away. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Urban Development Institute

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I had the pleasure of attending the 50th anniversary gala of the Urban Development Institute of Alberta. Over the years the institute has been working with communities and governments to implement their vision to positively contribute to the economic and social well-being of Albertans. UDI Alberta has chapters in Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Cold Lake, Grande Prairie, and Wood Buffalo.

The earliest development agreement was signed on October 15, 1955, in Calgary, and on November 10 a formal charter was drawn up under the Societies Act of Alberta, creating the first Urban Development Institute. Again, Mr. Speaker, Albertans were leading the way. The value of the institute was realized very quickly, and new divisions were formed in other parts of the country.

UDI's sphere of influence has expanded greatly over the years and covers every aspect of land development, from engineering specifications to tax reform and legislation. Chapters maintain strong municipal relationships, and UDI Alberta is the voice of the industry at the provincial level. I know their efforts to increase awareness of the diverse implications of urban growth and the need for realistic solutions for all of our communities will continue to help our province meet the demands of future growth and urbanization. I want to thank them for promoting efficient and effective urban growth and for providing collaborative leadership needed to build and develop communities that we can be proud of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I continue the series of petitions that I have been presenting for some time.

These petitions are signed by individuals from Stony Plain, Edmonton, Bruderheim, Calgary, Water Valley, Strathmore, and a number of other locations in Alberta. They are all requesting an independent and public inquiry regarding 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 concerned citizens from all across Alberta asking for 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 have another 216 signatures on a petition in the thousands calling for the Legislative Assembly to pass legislation that will "prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace."

I also have a number of signatures calling for the government 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 Edmonton-Gold Bar.

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

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to take measures that will require school boards and schools to eliminate all fees for instructional supplies and materials and general school services, including textbooks, musical instruments, physical education programs, locker rentals, lunch hour supervision and required field trips, and to ensure that the schools are not deprived of the resources necessary to offer these programs and services without additional charges to parents or guardians.

This is signed by concerned citizens in Olds, Didsbury, Sundre, and Bowden.

The second petition I have is signed by 95 individuals. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to

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

This is in addition to the thousands that already have been received.

Thank you.

2:50

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, did you wish to rise?

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I'd like to give notice to members of the House under Standing Orders 59.02(2) and 59.03(1)(b) and (3) with respect to Committee of Supply. It would be our intention to call Committee of Supply for one more day other

than as already scheduled pursuant to the schedule that was tabled in the House because, of course, the Order Paper indicates that there are 23 minutes that need to be scheduled for the Department of Agriculture estimates. That day would be the afternoon of Thursday, May 22, after Orders of the Day are called.

Also to give notice to the House, then, pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(3) that the vote on the estimates would be thereafter called as soon as the 23 minutes have been dealt with and therefore the 60 hours required by the House have been completed.

I would also, just for the information of the House, then, indicate that under 59.03(1)(b), all votes are to be done under one vote except those that members have given one day's notice that they would like to exempt. The one-day notice would be prior to, presumably, the calling of Orders of the Day on the 21st. If any member wishes to have a separate vote on any line of the budget, they should be providing the Clerk notice on that time frame.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill Pr. 1

Young Men's Christian Association of Edmonton Statutes Amendment Act, 2008

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Young Men's Christian Association of Edmonton Statutes Amendment Act, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, this noble not-for-profit association has presented a petition praying for an amendment to its incorporation statutes that will exempt all of its real and personal property from municipal taxes.

Thank you.

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

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Greater Edmonton Foundation. The foundation is disappointed that there is no increase to the lodge assistance program that has been included in the budget and says that seniors are finding it extremely difficult to find affordable housing.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from Mr. Terence Gannon, who lives in Calgary-Bow, but his business is in Calgary-Varsity. He would like to assemble and publish an open-source, that is free, reference index of energy-related wells for the western sedimentary basin. He has received the co-operation of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, but the ERCB wants to charge him \$75,000 for this information, and he's waiting for a response from the hon. Energy minister.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five letters to table this afternoon, and they are from constituents from the Edmonton-Gold Bar neighbourhood. These individuals are Wayne Grey Waldron, Edward Waritsky, Larry Derkach, Nathan

Cowper-Smith, and Alfonso Grafe, and all these individuals want to see fairer Alberta labour laws for all working people in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Environment, response to a question raised by Dr. Swann, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, during Oral Question Period on May 8, 2008, concerning a contained tailings release at the Suncor facilities in Fort McMurray in July 2007.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, I would just like to make this one comment. In all the parliaments that exist that follow the British model – there's only one exception to this – in all cases Speakers are unable to participate in debates in the House and are unable to participate in committees of supply, which means that they can't really advocate for anything on behalf of their constituents in this kind of a venue. The one exception to all of this is the Canadian Senate, where the Speaker of the Senate not only has the chair, but there's also a desk allocated for him. When the Speaker chooses to leave the chair and wants to go and advocate on behalf of his constituents for the potholes in his roads, he leaves and goes and sits over there. Please remember.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

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

Main Estimates 2008-09

Transportation

The Chair: I would now like to call on the hon. Minister of Transportation to open the debate.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to introduce members of my executive staff that are here in the Chamber this afternoon. To my left is Jay Ramotar, Deputy Minister of Transportation. To my right is Winnie Yiu-Young, senior financial officer, and next to her is Angela Paterson, director of financial planning. Also, seated in the members' gallery we have Tim Hawnt, assistant deputy minister of transportation and civil engineering; Terry Wallace, director of dangerous goods and rail safety branch, transportation safety services; Jerry Bellikka, director of communications; and my executive assistant, Warren Chandler. If you can all stand up.

Following the recent provincial election the former ministry of infrastructure and transportation was divided into two separate ministries. This allows both departments to focus on their areas of expertise. Transportation is responsible for planning, design, construction, and maintenance of the provincial highway network as well as water management infrastructure, and as before, we're responsible for the Transportation Safety Board. We have also retained all of the municipal infrastructure and transportation grant programs that we used to have. My ministry continues to make progress on seeing that our highways are safer for motorists. This includes our ongoing work on the implementation of the traffic safety plan.

Quite simply, roads play a critical role in the success of our province and in Albertans' quality of life. The ability to move people and goods safely and efficiently is vital to our prosperity, and the link between transportation and economic prosperity is clear. One of our government's top priorities is to provide roads and other public infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing economy and population.

Premier Stelmach has given me a mandate to lead the initiative to double provincial investment in highway repaving and bridge repair over the next three years. During the past couple of years industry capacity has been expanding, and we expect there will be sufficient capacity to meet this challenge. The government provided unprecedented funding in last year's three-year capital plan and demonstrated its support again in this year's plan. Thanks to this ongoing support my ministry continues to undertake numerous programs and projects in '08-09. I'd like to share some of these with you as I present the ministry's estimates for '08-09.

Transportation's expense and equipment/inventory purchases vote will be approximately \$2.2 billion, a 6.6 per cent increase from the '07-08 forecast. A key element of our program expense is capital support to municipal infrastructure. More than \$1.3 billion in grants will be provided to Alberta municipalities through programs such as the Alberta municipal infrastructure program, the Alberta cities transportation partnerships, the Alberta municipal water/waste-water program and Water for Life, rural transportation partnerships, and three federal-provincial grant programs, to just name a few. These grants enable local governments to direct funding at projects, including roads, bridges, public transit, water and waste water, and emergency services. Projects like these do much to help enhance the quality of life in our communities.

3:00

My ministry's total program expense includes nearly \$400 million for highway preservation and road maintenance, which takes into account the purchase of salt, sand, and gravel. The need for maintenance and rehab has risen substantially because many of our highway pavements built in the late '70s and '80s have reached the end of their lifespans.

Also, under the expense and equipment/inventory purchases vote a total of nearly \$41 million will go into transportation safety services. This funding supports vehicle and driver safety programming, monitoring the commercial carrier industry, and traffic safety initiatives that include implementation of the traffic safety plan.

The traffic safety plan is designed to reduce deaths and injuries on our roads. It outlines key initiatives to help prevent collisions, build safer roads, enforce traffic laws, and better educate Albertans about traffic safety. Stemming from the traffic safety plan, in '08-09 my ministry will implement initiatives in the areas of impaired driving, which, for example, would be an ignition lock program, and safety at intersections to reduce the injuries and deaths on Alberta roads.

Under the noncash items vote my ministry program expense is \$340 million for noncash items such as amortization, nominal sum disposals, and consumption of inventories.

In terms of capital investment the ministry's capital investment vote will be nearly \$1.9 billion in '08-09, an increase of about \$668 million from the '07-08 forecast. In addition, the ministry's statutory capital investment will be \$5 million in '08-09 for the work in progress on the Stoney Trail northeast P3 project. Continued investment in provincial highways systems and strategic economic corridors is critical to meet the transportation needs of Albertans and visitors to our province.

In 2008-09 capital investment will accomplish: twinning portions of highway 63 between Edmonton and Fort McMurray; ongoing

expansion and preservation work on other highways that are part of the northeast Alberta transportation corridor – there are lots there, highways 63, 28, 881, 61, and secondary 831 – moving ahead with the northeast segment of the Calgary Stoney Trail ring road; continuing with the northwest portion of the Calgary ring road, with planning to begin construction on the southwest leg; planning and construction of the northwest portion of Edmonton's Anthony Henday ring road; continuing development of the north-south trade corridor, including freeway status upgrades between Calgary and Edmonton, which is known as the Canamex highway; and increasing rehabilitation work on highways throughout the province.

The pavement rehabilitation backlog is estimated at 4,500 kilometres, and we have a solid plan to deal with that. The capital plan provides enough funding for us to repave about 2,800 kilometres of road over the next three years, and we hope to see an increase in funding in the future.

By 2010, if all goes according to the plan, it's expected that things will be ramped up to the point where we'll be rehabilitating roads as fast as they degrade. Our priority for the short term is to get a lot of highway rehab done in an effective and timely way.

Not only are we going to spend more on pavement rehab; we're going to be building more bridges also. We're also embarking on a bridge replacement program as part of the overall rehabilitation program. There are 13,000 bridges in Alberta, and about 4,200 of them are on the provincial highway network. That's not counting any within cities.

To wrap up, good roads support Alberta's economy. They're essential to the public safety and Albertans' quality of life. With an eye to the future it's important to take advantage of opportunities to create an even better Alberta. This means not only building new roads but taking good care of the roads that we already have.

I think I've covered this so well that we could just ask for the vote right now and then we could all get on with business. But I would answer some questions if anybody has any.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a very good gesture from my friend the hon. Minister of Transportation. We will get to the vote, but have some patience.

As you have covered all that you are going to do, I will just start with: over the past decade Alberta had the highest rate of economic growth in Canada, 4.3 per cent in 2006, and the economy grew by 6.8 per cent. Experts predict that Alberta will have one of Canada's top performing economies in the future. Alberta's export of goods and services more than doubled between 1996 and 2006, to \$90 million, and a growing number of those exports are manufactured products and services. Exports of manufactured goods more than doubled over the same period. Alberta had a rapidly growing manufacturing base between 1996 and 2006. Manufacturing shipments have almost doubled, to \$64 billion.

In order for our economy to grow and prosper, we need to have a good transportation system that will not only improve the safety of Albertans but it will have the safe and rapid movement of all the goods and services. It will also improve the quality of life, which my friend has talked about, for all Albertans. Albertans will not be sitting in traffic jams for hours and hours, and it will definitely cut down on road rage, on accidents, and it will even save Albertans lots of money in insurance costs. Whenever there's an accident, it is costly. It costs the economy money. Health care costs go up, and productivity goes down.

We need to plan ahead. We have to be proactive. If we plan

ahead, it will not only be cost-effective, but it will save us some headaches later on trying to catch up with all the work we fell behind on. If we plan accordingly, then we won't have to throw money at the problems that we still can't fix by throwing money at them.

For these reasons, our prosperity and economic growth, and in order to compete on the global stage, we need the best transportation system in Alberta. So I commend the minister on a huge \$5 billion capital investment in the provincial highway system for the coming three years. I have some concerns here about the quality of our highways because infrastructure has been kind of getting overloaded. We need to improve the highway system, which was the envy of the whole country in the past.

3:10

In the business plan, here on page 294, in the ministry's performance measures, 1(a), the physical condition of provincial highways, the percentage of highways in good condition is going to steadily decrease over the next three years, the percentage in fair condition will stay the same, and the percentage in poor condition will steadily increase. At the same time, according to the capital plan on page 100, the government is spending \$4 million on the provincial highways. With that funding we are in a kind of bad situation here because of the cutbacks and failure to plan. There was lots of money going into the highways in the last few years, and there will be lots of money going in in the future. We have this concern of how we're going to improve the infrastructure, you know, with all the money going into it.

Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Chairman, the hon. member is talking a lot about planning ahead, and I couldn't agree a hundred per cent more with him. We plan all the time. In fact, we have a three-year plan that we publish, that everything gets onto that three-year plan, and we get it done. We also have a five-year plan, a 10-year plan, and a 20-year plan. As you know and as everybody else knows, our Premier has come out with a great 20-year capital plan, and we're putting more dollars into savings, more dollars into infrastructure and rehabilitation.

Also, Mr. Chairman, he was talking about the physical condition of our provincial highways. We've never ever tried to say that we don't have a backlog. In fact, ever since I've been the Minister of Transportation, I've talked a lot about the huge backlog that we have and how important it is to get to our optimum and have all of our roads in good to fair condition. Yes, he's exactly right: we've published what our percentage in good condition is and in fair condition is and in poor condition is, and it is going uphill as far as the percentage that is falling down into the poor and the fair condition. The reason for that is that it takes awhile now, and most of our highways that were done in the '70s and '80s are reaching the end of their lifespan right now, and they're all hitting it at the same time. That's why we've put together a plan to catch up to that so that in three years' time we feel we'll be at the point to have caught up to where our roads are actually being rehabilitated as fast as they degrade.

You know, our objective is to make sure that we keep 80 per cent in good condition, 15 per cent in fair condition, and not more than 5 per cent in poor condition. As you can see, our percentage today is at 14 per cent in poor condition, going all the way up to 20 per cent by 2010-2011, when we say we'll have caught up to the backlog, and then we can start working on it going the other way. There's no sense in trying to give you any different numbers than that. We may be able to accelerate it a bit. We've spent the last couple of years working with our industries here, with the construc-

tion industry, to get their capacity up to speed. We've worked within our own government, within our own Treasury Board, to get our funds, our budget, up to speed so that we can actually bring that number down and make the roads safer for all Albertans and make the quality of life better for all Albertans.

He was talking about the traffic jams and everything. That's out of our jurisdiction and more within the cities' jurisdictions. That's why we as a government have built up our granting system. I've got to say that the great vision that our Premier had was to come out with the \$1.4 billion to help municipalities come up with being able to fix their infrastructure. Most of these traffic jam problems are in the cities, and it's not a hundred per cent their fault either. They have such growth in population that they have to work on their plans to keep up with the situation that's happening.

We have 8,700 kilometres of provincial highways that are approaching an age where they're going to have to become necessary. That's an increase of 600 kilometres over last year. You can see that we have all that. You can also see that we've increased our budgets. It's not like we're sitting here in the dark and not realizing where we're going with our roads. We've got plans out there to get everything in the shape that it should be. That may even make the opposition think we're doing a good job. But, boy, that's tough.

Oh, you had one more question in that round, didn't you? I think I've already covered what the other question was. You were talking a lot there about what it had to do with the backlog, and I think I said that we had that 4,500 kilometres of backlog. We believe the value of our backlog is about \$2 billion, and we're working our little buns off to make sure we catch up on that.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My concerns are still that over the next three years we will be spending over \$5 billion on the provincial highway network, but we will in effect be getting a worse system at the end of it. Why are Albertans getting a worse highway system after spending \$5.1 billion? Isn't the minister failing in his job? If you are going to spend all of this money, how about getting some clear benefits? If the government is this inefficient, what would it cost to actually get improvement on the highway network in three years? How much is the transportation infrastructure deficit we're going to cover in these three years?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Chairman, I actually covered every one of the questions that he just asked in my last answer. I explained piece by piece why we're going from the 14 per cent that we're at today to 20 per cent by 2011, and I also explained how we've been working on building up our capacity along with our construction companies that have all bought into the idea now and have increased their capacity. We're going to rehab more road this year than ever has been rehabbed in history in any other year in the province of Alberta, and for him to say that we don't have a plan or that it's the fault of the Minister of Transportation that we're not catching up, I just explained to him how it was going to be done and that we have a plan, so maybe he should clean his ears out and listen to the first answer before he comes up with a bunch more.

The \$5.1 billion that he was talking about is not just entirely for rehab work. That includes any of the new roads that we're going to build or any of the new roads that need to be built. We're going to spend \$1.9 billion through the capital plan this year and \$5.2 billion over the next three years. That's making a significant investment in the provincial highway network. The funding from '08-11 is going to provide for continued construction of the strategic economic

corridors, including the ring roads in Calgary and Edmonton. It's going to include the twinning and other improvements to highway 63 to Fort McMurray and all of the increased pavement rehabilitation work throughout the province, Mr. Chairman. I don't know how much clearer we can explain where the \$5.1 billion is going.

3:20

Again, I've got to say that it's going to be three years before we can catch up to that. We're going to be rehabilitating as much highway as degrades three years from now. Up until then – we're not trying to hide it – we're playing catch-up. Again, to explain that: remember that in the '70s and '80s, which was our last great boom, was when a lot of those roads were built, and most of our roads are engineered and designed to a 17-year lifespan.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question was also on the infrastructure deficit. How much is the infrastructure deficit that we are trying to cover with this \$5.1 billion? Is the problem of bad highways because of the infrastructure deficit? We've been deferring so long. Do you think it will just take three years, or will it take 10 years to fix all these problems? You know, we want to know the scale of the problem, how big of a problem we've got on our hands. You're saying that you're going to spend \$5.1 billion and that will fix all of our problems. With the way the economy is going, the population is growing. We are talking about having Port Alberta, and we are talking about going globally on our goods and services, and you think \$5.1 billion will be enough to cover the infrastructure deficit that we have because of those cutbacks in the '90s? That's my question to you, sir.

Mr. Ouellette: I don't know if you should go and take a little course in economics or what the heck because you'll never ever fix every single problem there is out there, but you can sure plan and work towards any of the problems that you know about. I had mentioned before that, yes, we have a \$2 billion backlog. We have \$2 billion that we want to catch up on, and that's what the \$5.1 billion is working towards. As far as completely getting rid of all our problems, that won't happen. I agree with you. I don't know exactly. We can only go by what the economists say they feel our growth is going to be, and we try to plan for that.

I've also been explaining that a few years ago, when we started really increasing our budgets and trying to get more work done, we didn't have the construction capacity in Alberta, and therefore we had to work on building that capacity. Today we feel that we have way more capacity than we had two years ago and more than we've had last year, and that's why we're going to get more roads rehabilitated and built this year than we ever have in the past.

By the same token, I know that you're meaning well by the questions you're asking, that you're saying: we want to get all of our roads fixed as fast as we can. We're working towards that. If we could twin every highway in Alberta, if we could ever come up with that kind of a budget, we know we'd have safer highways because that's the safest highway you can drive on to save lives. But you also have to live within a means and within a budget, and I'm working towards increasing that all the time. As soon as we increase it, then I can just tell that the opposition will be saying: oh, you're spending like a drunken sailor. You can't suck and blow. We can just tell you what we want to do.

Mr. Kang: Well, you said that yourself. I think you've been spending like a drunken sailor. That's why there's not enough

money in the heritage trust fund, and the debt you guys paid off was created by your government, sir, and because of the cutbacks, that's why we're suffering on our roads and that's why we're suffering in our hospitals.

My question was: do you have a plan to fix our transportation system in five years, 10 years? Do you have some kind of plan there?

Now, we're coming to private highway maintenance. The provincial highway maintenance has been privatized. It's going up by over \$24 million from last year's budget, to \$267.5 million. The minister has said in discussions in this House recently that these companies are only paid if they are out on the road doing their work. What form of contracts do you have with the private maintenance companies? Is it fee for service and performance? What kind of contract do you have with them?

Mr. Ouellette: You know, Mr. Chairman, every single time we've got up, we've explained the plan, how we're going to work the plan, and every single time he's got back up and said we've got no plan. So let's talk real slow this time.

Ms Blakeman: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: A point of order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Blakeman: Under 23(j), Mr. Chair. I understand that the minister is very passionate about his particular portfolio, and he tends to be an energetic and exuberant individual to begin with, but he's made a number of choices of language in the debates thus far that I really feel are not necessary. I believe that all of my colleagues have at a minimum one degree from a postsecondary educational institution and in some cases more than that. So there's no question about the intellectual ability of any of my colleagues, and I would very much appreciate it if the minister could respect that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. minister, you can continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Ouellette: Yes. To repeat myself, we had one to three years of catch-up time here to just try to get to the position where roads are not degrading faster than we can rehabilitate them, and then we have the next four to 10 years to get to our target or our optimum, as I had said earlier, where only 5 per cent of our roads will ever be in poor condition.

Now, with the point of order and everything I forgot what the next question was, but I think it was on highway maintenance. Our contracts on highway maintenance, you are right on both counts. They are fee for service, but we also have a flat base fee. So we have a base fee, and then it goes to fee for service. Their base fee is about 60 per cent of the total contract or of the cheques that they end up getting, which really wouldn't be enough to support their company, so they need that. We believe that the best way to get things done is to have some incentive there, and the incentive there is that if you're not out on the road working, you don't get your fee for service. So there is the base fee, and then there's a fee for service.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. How much is included in the base fee, and do you do any performance measures on them? How often are they done? What are the penalties and rewards? If there's a financial plan for penalties, where is the revenue from those penalties just on the budget?

3:30

Mr. Ouellette: Well, again I have to say that if they don't work, they don't get paid. About 45 per cent of the total contract or the total monies that we pay out to maintenance contractors is base fee, give or take. That's what I'm being told by our officials and stuff. About 45 per cent is the base, and the rest of it is fee for service.

Maintenance contractors work to the same standards that government did when it maintained highways. We supply what we believe should be the quality we want them to take the road to. They then do that job, and we have inspectors on contract to us that go out and do their tours to make sure that the maintenance contractors are doing their jobs. At times of some major storms, the storm just simply overpowers us from what we have the capability of. Whether that was private contractors out there doing the job or it was back in the days when we owned equipment, when you had a great storm, it just would overpower us, and we didn't have enough equipment to get out there. For this past storm that you had asked me quite a few questions about, I thought we only had 500 snowplows on the road, and I found out later that we actually had 600 snowplows on the road. So even the maintenance contractors have their fleet of equipment, and when we get an overpowering storm like that, they actually subcontract more equipment out if they can get their hands on it to go out there and help do the job.

Mr. Kang: The hon. minister said, you know, that the quality of road maintenance is the same as when the government was doing it. How come the quality of roads has been going down if the maintenance was the same as when the government was doing it? The minister is talking about: storms don't happen every day. When I questioned you, sir, there was only one maintenance vehicle on the road that Sunday. You said there were 600 of them there from Calgary to Edmonton. When the private contractors are there, they will try to cut corners because they are in it for profit. I think the maintenance should come back to the government, and then we can do a better job on the maintenance.

Going back to the discussion about performance measure 1(a) on page 294 of the business plan, again, this money doesn't seem to be getting us any great improvement in our road conditions. If anything, it's just getting deterioration. Why? How is the government getting such a bad return for Albertans for their money?

Mr. Ouellette: First of all, Mr. Chairman, I didn't ever say that there were 600 on the road on highway 2. That covers the full province of Alberta. He may have only seen one on the road, but I can guarantee you there's never been only one on the road from Edmonton to Calgary, on that highway. I shouldn't say guarantee you because I haven't actually seen that many, but the one night that he questioned me, I was behind three different snowplows driving from Red Deer to Edmonton.

We've set the standards at the same as what the standards were when the government ran the equipment. We have inspectors that go out on that road to see that that's adhered to. Yes. You're talking about two different things, hon. member, when you talk about our maintenance has gone downhill for our roads to go downhill. We're talking about our roads being in poor, fair, and good condition on the actual quality of that road, not the maintenance as far as gravelling, clearing snow off, or filling cracks. We're saying that when they're in poor condition, they've reached that point in their lifespan.

The other thing that people seem to not follow in what we're doing today and in the private sector that is contracted by us today is that in the past 10, 12 years since it's been privatized, there are a lot of technologies that have changed. There are some technologies that we're allowing them to use in our actual climate and everything here that I don't know myself yet if they really work the same as what the tests we get. We do things such as prewetting units; that's out there. We have GPS tracking systems today to know exactly where these snowplows have been. We have weather information stations with cameras and stuff on them to send our equipment out to.

Our road maintenance contract is a lot more for doing that stuff than saying what condition that actual road is: poor, fair, or good. As I said before, we're rating that poor, fair, or good on how those roads are reaching the end of their lifespan. Lots of them are still in fair condition, and they're way past what the engineered lifespan said they would be. We also don't want to just be out there wasting money.

I have to tell you. No matter where you go in Alberta today, because of our strong booming economy, because of such good government that created that, we have the larger influx of people which put all that pressure. Whenever anything is booming, we have heavier loads on our roads, which creates more maintenance. All of that sort of thing has been happening, hon. member. We're planning towards all of that.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Minister. That's where we were talking about the plan. If we had a plan, then I don't think our roads would be deteriorating to that condition. I think you said it yourself. Our growing economy: we know what rate the economy is going to grow at, and we can adjust our plan according to the growth of the province.

On page 53 of the Auditor General's 2006-07 annual report there was \$1.3 billion of deferred maintenance backlog in the province. That is \$1.3 billion of maintenance that our privatized maintenance companies have put off rather than do at the right time. Does the minister agree with that figure? If not, then exactly how much deferred maintenance is there on our provincial highway system?

Mr. Ouellette: Hon. member, I don't have the Auditor General's report here, but I honestly believe that you're mixing up rehabilitation and maintenance figures. Yes, we have a huge backlog in our rehabilitation, not what we class as maintenance. Now, it could be a play on words or whatever that somebody is thinking it's maintenance, but it really is rehabilitation. Those roads need to be rehabilitated because they've reached the end of their lifespan. I do agree. I don't remember the exact figure you said, but I know that we're \$2 billion behind in rehabilitation.

3:40

Mr. Kang: On drinking and driving, there are some money issues in this. Business plan, page 296. There's a very obvious gap between the last section, the measure of the percentage of drivers involved in fatality collisions who had consumed alcohol, 2(b), and the target for this coming year from 22.7 per cent to 18.7 per cent. There are some money issues in this. Probably there are some policy issues. Over 1 in 5 people die in those accidents. How is the government expecting to make such dramatic improvements all of a sudden?

Mr. Ouellette: I'd like to see bigger improvements than that, to tell you the truth. But we believe that this percentage isn't out of whack. Right now of any fatality accident, that's saying that 22 per cent of

them have been consuming alcohol. We're working on things through the traffic safety plan to get it down to 18.7 per cent. I still think that's too high a number, but we want to make sure that we set our goals at an achievable number.

It's part of the government's ongoing commitment to increase traffic safety on our roads, and impaired driving is a very important part of that. The addition of what we're looking at doing is putting in possibly a mandatory ignition interlock program, which will affect convicted impaired drivers who blew double the legal limit of 80 milligrams or higher or refused to provide a breath or blood sample or were repeat offenders within the preceding 10 years. Any of those people, we're proposing, automatically would not get their licence back without a mandatory ignition interlock system. The Transportation Safety Board then monitors every person that has an ignition interlock. That device records, then, any time they get into their vehicle to drive it. If they just stop on their way home somewhere for . . . [Mr. Ouellette's speaking time expired] Do I have to sit down now? Is that what that means? Thank you.

The Chair: We are going to the next 20 minutes, so, Minister, you can continue and, hon. member, you can continue.

Mr. Ouellette: If you were to just on your way home stop by at a friend's house, stop by at the local pub, or whatever and have one glass of wine, that wouldn't put you over what you're legal to drive home with, but when you blew in your machine to start it up, it would record that. So when the Driver Control Board looks at it and they see that every day you're going to .02 or .06, you're not really breaking the law, but they know you still have a problem, and they're going to make you keep that machine there.

Ms Blakeman: For how long?

Mr. Ouellette: We're working on that right now. That's one of the things we want to bring forward in the traffic safety plan in the near future.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Does that machine record every time a person has a drink and blows into that machine? Is there a record kept that the person behind the wheel had been drinking consistently and he may go over some day? Is there anything to keep track of his or her drinking habits?

Mr. Ouellette: Yeah. Every time you go to start the vehicle, you have to blow into the machine. If it's over .08, it disables your car. It doesn't mean your car is going to quit right away. It's going to give you a notice. It's going to give you time to apply your brakes, pull over to the side of the road, and stop because it's disabling your car. Up until that point it will always start, but it records. It has a full recording. When you have to go in once a month or once every two months or whatever it is, the machine recorded every time you blew in there and recorded any alcohol. If you've been disabled once, you have to take the vehicle in and get it reset. So the Driver Control Board knows, and it has the power to revoke your licence at any time. If that ever gets disabled, they are the ones that have to re-enable your car, and chances are that you're going to get your licence pulled by the board right at that time.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, sir. Going to the mechanical safety of

commercial vehicles, measure 2(c), page 296, the measure is the percentage of inspected commercial vehicles requiring on-site adjustments. In 2006-07 the last actual measure was 29.7 per cent, with a target for this year and the next two of 21.9 per cent. Again, why the expectation that there will be such a dramatic drop in the number of vehicles requiring on-site adjustments? Once again, the comparison between the target of 2006 was 19 per cent, so the actual result was over 10 per cent more than the target. This is a huge failure. Why did the ministry do so badly on that measure in 2006-07?

Mr. Ouellette: You know, over the past four years you can see that the actual average was about 25 per cent. But, yes, '06-07 jumped up pretty high. Because of that, we're doing more random checks. We're having more people out there. We're probably ticketing more people to let them know that we're very, very serious about this and that we won't tolerate any out-of-service types of vehicles on the road.

These measures are really random checks. These aren't even vehicles stopping at our weigh scales and stuff. This is us, our Department of Transportation people, getting together with the sheriffs or the RCMP or city police and doing spot checks. There were a bunch done in '06-07, I'm being told, within the cities, and within the cities they never have to go to our vehicle inspection stations because they're not on the highway and getting pulled over. There were a lot of these right within the cities, and therefore we're going to clamp down a little more on truckers within the cities.

3:50

Mr. Kang: Does this have anything to do with the private safety testing of commercial vehicles, you know, the private outfits doing the safety inspections on these vehicles? Does that have anything to do with that? Maybe they're cutting corners on the private safety inspections? You get my point? Does this have anything to do with the privatization of the safety inspections on the vehicles?

Mr. Ouellette: No. I would have to say no because they're not the people that actually do any of these stats. These stats are done by our Department of Transportation officials. By the way, we have one that won an international competition on knowing how to inspect a vehicle—he came home with first place—how to tear down a vehicle and put it back to know what's safe and what isn't. So I commend the people from our department in our vehicle safety program and our Department of Transportation safety inspectors.

The private guys inspecting your vehicle. The only place that would be bad is if there are private guys that are letting people out on the road without these vehicles being right, and I don't know of any of that happening. You know, what we use for this is the North American standard of auto service criteria to determine what you should let them get away with and not let them get away with before you take their vehicle out of service.

Mr. Kang: In the government's estimates for 2008-2009 on page 418, line 3.0.9 shows that the CAMRIF budgeted amount last year was \$60 million, but only \$7 million was spent. The government's press release over a year ago announced over \$60 million in spending, but clearly that hasn't been spent. Why did the government announce all those projects but then failed to get the funding out last year as they had budgeted to do?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, the one year we had less actual submissions from the municipalities. CAMRIF goes to all the municipalities, right? That's what that grant is for. It's funded a third by us and a

third by the feds. We actually have a group of provincial department guys and federal department guys on a committee that approve those programs. I just know that we ran out of money long before we ran out of program. The programs that we got asked for that year we couldn't get approved fast enough to get the money spent, but it carried on to the next year.

Mr. Kang: On the same page of the government estimates, program 3.0.4, the resource road program was underspent by \$17 million, or 34 per cent, last year. It has decreased further this year, in total down 68 per cent from last year's budget. Why the underspending last year? What projects are planned for this year?

Mr. Ouellette: You know, that particular program, the resource road program, was a \$17 million program for a long time. I don't know how many years back. Then we found that there were so many requests for that program because of, again, our booming economy, that has been going on in Alberta because of the good governance here. The municipalities needed more money to repair some of those resource roads where there were a lot of big trucks, and we got one-time funding allotted to us of \$34 million to add to that program that one year. So we had a bigger program. But we're back down to the normal program, and we have \$17 million again this year.

You want to know who got that money? Is that what you're asking? There have been approvals. There are \$16 million worth of approvals already done for this year.

Mr. Kang: What projects are planned for this year?

Mr. Ouellette: I'm going to give you a guess here, but I would say that we probably had \$70 million or \$80 million worth of requests. We have criteria that are followed by officials in the department, and they rate those programs. We have a list somewhere – it wouldn't be here, I don't think – and we may not have even let every municipality know yet which ones qualified. So, yes, the money is spent. It may not have been sent out to the municipalities. It's whichever ones met the criteria. Remember that these are all rural. The resource road program money would all go to rural municipalities that fit the criteria for resource-type road projects.

Mr. Kang: High-speed rail. We are big supporters of the high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary via Red Deer. In particular, we would like to see it as an electric greenfield link. This will not only help the environment; it will save us money because lots of people will be taking the train between the two cities. That will save us money on gas, it will save our environment, and it will save on accidents because people won't be sleeping behind the wheel when they are driving. It will be much more productive for the economy, and it will be cheap, safe transportation. If people do fall asleep on the train, they won't cause any accidents. They will only be falling a little bit behind when they are getting off the train. Is there any money in this budget for any aspect of that link, and if so, how much and where?

Mr. Ouellette: Not a penny. Not a penny. But I will say that we're very interested in high-speed rail, also. We've just received a report that we had done, and I'm going to be getting it put together. Our department is analyzing it a little bit now, and I'm going to be presenting it to cabinet and caucus, and then we will be releasing the results after that.

4:00

The main objective of that report was to estimate the potential

ridership and revenues of four different high-speed train technologies: a 200-kilometre an hour diesel electric train, a 240-kilometre an hour jet or electric train, a 320-kilometre an hour overhead electric train, and a 500-kilometre an hour maglev train. I've had, just by talking to different manufacturers of trains and people's guesstimates, what it would cost to do this high-speed rail. When you get into that 500 one, I've had estimates everywhere from \$12 billion to \$16 billion to actually do that particular train.

I also can say – and I'm going to let a little bit of the cat out of the bag here on a few things from that report – that in that report, they did say that we would have no ridership or that it wouldn't even pay for the operation of it, for sure, if we didn't have, basically, the 300-kilometre an hour train because, otherwise, it would just be too long of a time from Edmonton to Calgary.

We've been talking a little bit about trying to work on a right-of-way, and I haven't got approval from my caucus or cabinet yet. As you know, we do have a right-of-way just in downtown Edmonton, and in downtown Calgary we purchased some land for stations for it. No matter how far out it is or when we can actually do something, my own belief is that if we can't get any private enterprise interested to invest money into that train, it probably isn't the right time yet. I'm not saying that it's to be in a position where it makes money, and it has to for private enterprise, let's say, but it has to at least spark some interest. There has to be enough there to at least cover the operating, and somehow we've got to figure out how to come up with the capital when we're talking those big dollars. But, yes, we are looking at it. We're trying to get this report analyzed as fast as we can. I'll bring it forward to cabinet and caucus and then get it released, and we'll go from there.

Mr. Kang: I'll talk a little bit about the airport tunnel. I think you haven't got anything on the airport tunnel yet. You know, it comes down to planning again. Has anybody approached you on the airport tunnel? It's going to be needed very, very badly in Calgary. It will move traffic east and west. I'm raising that question with you, sir, again today. Is there anything in the plan for the airport tunnel for Calgary?

Mr. Ouellette: There isn't anything in our plan at all for it, and it would never come to us because, really, that's totally a city of Calgary infrastructure issue. It would be the same as their C-Train issue. At the same time, though, remember that we do supply a lot of grants for infrastructure to municipalities. Calgary gets AMIP funding. They get MSI funding. They get new deals for cities funding. All of those different granting purposes could go. They have that choice. They decide where they want to put that money, but the airport tunnel would qualify under those grants, and they could use money from those grants for that.

The Chair: Well, that's completed the first hour allocated for the Official Opposition.

Now I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. Would you like the 20 minutes with the minister or 10 each?

Mrs. Leskiw: Just a few minutes.

Mr. Chair, highway 55 between La Corey and Iron River is in my constituency. My predecessor worked on getting this portion of the highway upgraded but did not succeed. I campaigned on the issue of widening highway 55. It's amazing that I actually got an e-mail from my constituency dealing with highway 55 because they watched the question period when the minister did not answer.

Mr. Ouellette: I didn't have a choice.

Mrs. Leskiw: That I realize.

On a weekly basis people living by highway 55 or travelling this highway phone or e-mail me on a continuous basis asking me when this government is going to spend money on improving this highway. I promised that I would not let highway 55 get dropped off the radar screen.

The minister spoke on public safety. Safety is what the people in Bonnyville-Cold Lake are concerned with when it comes to highway 55. The minister spoke about taking good care of our highways. Therefore, why isn't highway 55 on the three-year plan? How long does my constituency need to wait to get highway 55 to the point where people feel it's safe to drive on?

It took 15 years for the government to consider twinning highway 28 between Cold Lake north and Cold Lake south. On behalf of my constituency I want to thank you for proceeding on highway 28. The people in Cold Lake are thrilled about that one. I hope that it doesn't take 15 years to widen highway 55. Could the minister tell me when highway 55 is on the capital plan? I hope it's before I retire from this position as an MLA.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, hon. member, we have rated the surface of the road of highway 55 as actually fair condition. There were minor rut repairs completed last year, and additional repairs are scheduled for this summer. Repaving highway 55 between La Corey and Iron River we believe will not be needed for a number of years. The higher priority for the department is to widen highway 55 between La Corey and Iron River, and it would not make sense to repave that road until we widen it. This is the last section of highway 55 to be widened, and with the large amount of truck traffic on this section of roadway it's also a priority for our department.

Our department is currently completing the engineering and design work for widening highway 55. The widening project is not in our three-year plan right now. It will be ranked with other highway improvements across the province, and we will proceed with that as soon as funding becomes available and it gets ranked in that needs-to-be-done situation. It may be there now, but there may be other highways that need a little more.

Mrs. Leskiw: Mr. Chairman, so the minister won't mind if I keep badgering him for the next three years on making the widening of highway 55 a priority? We will be getting letters and more letters. As I get them, I'll be more than happy to give them to you so you could respond to my constituents as to when highway 55 will be widened.

Mr. Ouellette: I don't mind if you badger me at all because I know that's your job to look after your constituents. I know you'll do a great job looking after your constituents, and I'll do whatever I can to help you.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. A couple of issues I'd like to go back on, dig a little further with the minister. If I can just go back to the fee-for-service maintenance contracts. I understand that we're talking about seasonal maintenance on the highways. This is snow clearing, debris removal, blah, blah, blah. But I am interested in what is included in the base fee. I put myself through university running a lawn maintenance company. All of our contracts had that same base fee. Basically, what they paid for was

that for X amount of money you were guaranteed to get 20 cuts of your grass in a summer, and if it went beyond that, then you paid on a cost plus 10 per cent or some other scheme.

4:10

My questions. I'm assuming we're looking at the same sort of setup here. What is included? How many road plows? How many clearings are included in that base amount? Or is the base amount equivalent to something else, like a commission fee or something, where it's a flat amount of money just to engage with the person, and then you're paying above and beyond that for each time they come out? I don't think that's right. I suspect that my earlier experience more closely mirrors the setup that you have with these contractors for service provision. What exactly is included in that base fee? Are there a certain number of times that they are expected to go out and clear under that base fee amount? Are they expected, you know, to sand six times, and how much sand are they supposed to lay down?

That's why we keep coming back to you. We're searching for what actually is the deal with this because when I go back and talk to my constituents or in this case constituents outside of my constituency, they say, "But what is this?" I say: "Well, I don't know. We keep asking the minister, and he just says that we don't understand what's going on." But I think we do, actually, so I'd like to know exactly what is included in those base contracts. I don't want to have to go through the expense and time of FOIPing it, so you can take the details out of who you're dealing with, but let me know what is included in that base fee amount. If that's 60 per cent of what they're likely to make out of a seasonal contract, what's included in it?

Mr. Ouellette: There really is no freebie in the base contract. The base contract we say is about 45 per cent of what they end up getting at the end of the year. It isn't a standby fee, but it could be if they never ever got called out to do one job. If it never ever snowed, if they never ever had to grade a gravel road, if they never ever had to add any gravel, if they never had anything, they would get a base fee regardless. But as soon as that one wheel moves – in other words, there's no set number, but every time they move out and they put a bill in for those hours, they really don't get any extra until the base fee is used up. When the base fee is used up, then they start to make more money.

Ms Blakeman: How, then, do you work to make sure that you don't end up with a situation where a contractor says: "Okay. Fine. I've got it." Let me just make up some numbers here so we can use them as examples. Let's say the signing fee that you've got with them, what you call the base fee, is \$10,000. How do you make sure? How do you set up this contract so you don't end up with Laurie's Bobcat and Contracting, who, the minute I move the wheels on my grader, as you put it, I'm going to bill you 9,000 bucks for grading that piece of road first time out, and then every time after that I'm going to charge you \$9,000. You're not clear enough about how those contracts actually work. You must have some kind of a fee schedule attached to that where you expect that every time they move their wheels, they are going to be charging you some sort of rate that is considered reasonable. Otherwise, I would be charging 9,500 bucks to move my wheels the first time, and then I would have used up the base fee, and then I'd be charging you from then on, and I'd be in the gravy. How do you control that?

Mr. Ouellette: When the contracts are set up, when they RFP it, or go out for a request for proposal, everybody bids a number. You

may say in those contracts that there's a set government rate for every piece of equipment that they bid to begin with. That's how we would have decided who got the contract. If that fee is \$10 an hour, that's what they would get. But we also order the work. When it snows, we don't have to order them to go out and move snow. They're brighter than that. Actually, the RCMP call them out lots, too. There are times when the RCMP don't want our guys on the road, depending on what the conditions are. Then we have our inspectors that go out, and all of the maintenance contractors are supposed to have one of these guys, too. I do see them on the roads quite a bit. They drive these roads and see where there's a pothole or a dangerous dip. That's when you see the little red arrows by the side of the road. Their inspector puts that out there, and if he needs a truck there right away to fix something, he calls them. We also have inspectors that go out, and if they see a culvert that somebody has bent up or did this or did that, they phone the maintenance contractor, order him to go do that work. Then he falls under those fees in that contract that he bid that he was willing to supply equipment for.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Last question in this series, then. Are there additional standards that are put in place; for example, for sanding? As part of the contract or as part of the request for proposals does the government set forward something that says: when you sand, we expect that you will be laying down between a quarter-inch and a half-inch of sand, or can they just lay whatever kind of sand, whatever amount they want? Is there some kind of standard that they're required to adhere to which you can then use as a performance measurement?

Mr. Ouellette: Yeah. I don't know what numbers they use; it's the same thing as on a gravel road. We have a government spec that you can't have any aggregate over three-quarters of an inch or whatever, and they have the same. I don't know the number we use, but they can't have any granular bigger than X millimetre kind of thing. For some reason I got calls on it this year. I don't know if our spec changed a little bit. I've inquired to our guys, and I don't know if I got the briefing back yet or not. I did get calls this year where people said: did you increase the size of your granular because it seems like I've had more rocks hitting my windshield? So I get all those calls the same as probably every other MLA here. We try to find out what's happened, send our inspector out there, see if some guy loaded the wrong stuff. You know, nobody is perfect in this day and age. People can make a mistake now and then, but we try our darndest.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I realize that the minister couldn't be expected to know that off the top of his head, but if we can get the background to what we've just been discussing in writing prior to when we have to conclude the votes, that would be helpful.

I'm going to move on and talk about a larger policy issue, and that's around longer range planning because one of the things I'm noticing – well, everyone is noticing – is that we've had a real driving economy here, and we are behind on a lot of things: schools, hospitals, roads, all kinds of things. We're also having trouble attracting people to come here and start up businesses.

Let me use the example of a concrete plant because that's something we're really short of in Alberta, and it's holding up a lot of projects, right? I'm from Saskatchewan and I'm running Laurie's

concrete in Saskatchewan. I'm considering coming to Alberta, but every time I look at what's being said in Alberta, I keep getting pronouncements from the government that say: "Well, we're going to load a whole hunk of money in here because we had a heck of a good surplus, and we're just going to plow that money into a whole bunch of projects. You know, we're going to do 15 projects this year, but don't anybody think that this is the way we're going to keep going now. Don't set your hearts on this. One year only." Well, there I am in Saskatchewan going: there's no point in my bothering to move to Alberta or expand into Alberta and set up a concrete plant because this is one year only, even if those projects obviously are going to take more than one year to complete.

As far as attracting people from other places or even people from Alberta to invest in something that is a huge long-range investment, why would they do it when they're constantly told that this is one time only? I think there is a philosophical or policy barrier in the way the government is approaching this. We get one step forward and two steps back. We may get a little bit of work done, but we're not attracting the rest of – I have to be careful to choose my words here – that supporting base, that infrastructure support base that we need to do the rest of the construction that we're clearly in desperate need of in this province.

4:20

Can the minister talk a little bit about – I mean, his department is roads, clearly, but that's an important transportation network for us in this province. We tend to do things by road a lot, and if we're going to fly stuff, we fly it out of the province. We do have a rail system, but it tends to be again connected with moving things into or out of the province. But interprovince, we're talking the roadways. When we're looking at things like overpasses and development, widening of roads, for example, does the government recognize that they are giving a contrary signal to those who might wish to be interested in a longer range investment of things that would help us to improve our capacity for delivering infrastructure?

Mr. Ouellette: I'm going to speak mostly on what's been happening in Transportation here. In Transportation, if you have followed it the last few years, we haven't been saying one time only. We've actually been saying: "Hey, this is the place to locate. Look at the size of the budget we have. These are our expectations." It's getting better, and we've actually increased our capacity here by quite a lot. What really helped that is our P3s on the ring roads. They brought in some very large international companies to bid on those projects, and they bid on a whole bunch of others while they were doing it.

Our capacity has risen a lot in our grading contractors and our paving contractors, and we believe that's really going to help us. We never used to RFP any of our second- and third-year business plan stuff. We've now started to do some of that, and that's also made contractors say: "Hey, we are in this for the long haul. We will stay here and do some work." There are more people looking at Alberta.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. That's good. That's longer range planning, and I think that's going to help us.

I just want to touch again on the high-speed rail, which I'm very keen on. I love driving my car, but when it's for business, I'd really rather take a high-speed train. Did I hear the minister say that the government had purchased land in downtown Edmonton and downtown Calgary for stations? I thought I heard him say that. Then I thought, no, that can't be right. So I'm just going to clarify that one. I know that there was a private member's bill that was passed last year, I think, about assembling the land, and I'm

wondering how well we're doing in assembling that corridor of land on which high-speed rail could be situated, or perhaps we're not doing that at all, in which case I'm sure the minister will tell me. So the land for the stations in the two cities' downtown and assembling the corridor.

The third part of that is that the minister referred to a report the government has commissioned. You'll forgive my cynicism; it's hard earned. Will the minister be releasing the complete report or excerpts of the report?

Mr. Ouellette: The Edmonton station land was already here when I became minister, so I don't know exactly when that was brought on board. We purchased the Calgary since I've been the minister. There wasn't a private member's bill that I know of. If there was, I had to be missing or whatever. Maybe it was a motion because there's no bill out there that I know of.

The first step that we have to do, though, is a corridor study and then start purchasing the land, and we haven't got there yet.

Ms Blakeman: Okay. I'm going to go on to talk about regional transportation. Here in Edmonton we're very interested in extending our LRT out to the Edmonton region: Sherwood Park, St. Albert, for example. What is the government looking at in a three-year or a five-year plan to assist with that regional funding? Clearly, you know, you can see the problem that happens with that. Any individual municipality is going to say, "Well, we'll get from our border to our border but not the linkage that's in between," and then the next person picks it up. So that is a role for the Alberta government to play. It is part of what should be coming out of the Municipal Affairs minister's regional strategy. I'm sorry; I can't remember the big, fancy name for it.

Mr. Ouellette: Capital region integrated management plan.

Ms Blakeman: Capital region integrated management plan. I knew it'd have a long, fancy name. There you go.

That was certainly also anticipating that the provincial government was going to have a role in helping those regions integrate these various services. The other piece of that puzzle, which you have heard from us a great deal, is the frustration over seeing that there is a federal government program which is on a per capita basis, the building Canada fund, which is federal money allocated on a per capita basis. It is intended to go to light rail transit, to the larger municipalities. That's the one that we keep hearing is being negotiated as we speak by the President of the Treasury Board. We're getting pretty clear signals that it's not going to end up being used for any kind of LRT and not on a regional basis.

One, is that what's happening here? Two, if we're not going to get the funding through the feds to be directed towards that transportation, LRT, then what is the province looking at doing around regional transportation? This is mostly mass transit I'm talking about, but I suppose it could be expanded to other things.

Mr. Ouellette: You know, there was just an announcement done here that the feds did put in that \$53 million, I think it was. That money can be used for light rail transit or for whatever the city decides to use it for as transit.

Ms Blakeman: Today?

Mr. Ouellette: No. When was that done? About a month ago was the announcement. They transferred the money to my department, and we're sending the cheques to the municipalities. The only

municipalities that qualified for this money were municipalities that actually have a transit system. So Edmonton qualified. I think Edmonton got \$18 million or something that they're going to get out of that. We're figuring out the per capita of all of the municipalities that have transit in them. It's 100 per cent federal money. We're just disbursing it for them.

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

Mr. Ouellette: Other things you were talking about: the capital region management plan. You've got to remember another thing with transit. You know, there's \$1.4 billion that our Premier had announced is going to be there over 10 years. All of that money that's put out to these municipalities they can use, especially under the Minister of Municipal Affairs, which was really after regional co-operation with some of the MSI money, where it had to be regional programs to qualify. Some of that's changed now. I don't know exactly because it's somebody else's program, but I know it's a good program within this government. They can use that money. They can collaborate. If there's more than one municipality, they could collaborate and use that money on transportation. [Mr. Ouellette's speaking time expired] I guess I have to quit.

The Chair: I would like now to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to ask the hon. minister a couple of questions. I didn't quite get the answer to that question that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre asked you when you were cut short, so I would like to perhaps have you give her that opportunity to ask it again.

Thank you.

4:30

Mr. Ouellette: To answer you a little bit on the integrated management plan, you know all the different municipalities it includes, so I don't have to go through that. The plan identifies projects worth \$5.5 billion over 10 years, of which the province is responsible for about \$4 billion, and over 35 years there are projects that total \$7.2 billion, of which the province will be responsible for \$6.5 billion. I don't know exactly which ones that plan identified, but that's the kind of money that it has identified. I mean, some of the projects transportationwise are the Fort Saskatchewan bypass, two bridges across the North Saskatchewan River, twinning of highways 15, 21, 28A, 37, 38, 45, 643, 825, and 830, as well as interchanges at highways 15, 21, 21A, 37, and 830. So lots of highways. The total provincial responsibility in the Industrial Heartland is \$1.5 billion, of which \$532 million is in our 10-year plan.

Also, while I have that, I just got a note from my staff here that says that we sent the website link for the maintenance performance guidelines to the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall on Friday, and the information is public and should already be available to you. Is that good enough, then, for what you had asked me?

Ms Blakeman: I think so. Yeah.

Mr. Ouellette: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Webber: Okay. Great. Thank you for the answer to that question.

I do have a couple of concerns in my constituency also, hon.

minister. I know that the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake has some serious concerns in her riding as well with regard to the widening of her highway. I feel that the concerns that I have in my constituency are far greater a priority than in Bonnyville-Cold Lake, so I hope that you would rank me up higher than her in the lobbying.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, a couple of concerns in my constituency. With regard to the Calgary Stoney Trail, the northwest ring road, this particular road intersects my constituency, and it is affecting a lot of people in my area in a positive way but also in a negative way or in an anticipated negative way down the road. It's with regard to the noise levels. I know that this was brought up last week in question period with regard to the noise that is anticipated on this road, but I'm already hearing about it now. I realize that it's very hard to determine what kind of noise level there will be on a road that hasn't been built yet, but I know that there is concern now. They want to know if there's a plan in place with regard to putting up noise barriers or some type of a berm in the area in order to keep the noise levels down. That is one of the concerns that I have with respect to that.

Now, there is also a second concern that my constituents have brought up to me. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned that she knows someone who is interested in building a concrete plant somewhere in Alberta. Laurie's concrete plant, she had mentioned. I have issues in my constituency, and I'm hoping that she does not plan on building that in my constituency at all, her concrete plant. Anyway, I do have a gravel pit and an asphalt plant in my constituency already, so I don't need any more concrete plants moving in there. This asphalt plant and gravel pit is in the north Citadel area in my riding.

Mr. Ouellette: Up by Spy Hill.

Mr. Webber: Up by Spy Hill, exactly.

I know you're aware of some of the issues with respect to that. In the summer of '07 there was paving to be done on the Deerfoot Trail, and it could only be done at night because, of course, you can't shut down the Deerfoot during the day, during high traffic periods, so you would do the paving at night. What this did, though, hon. minister, as you know, was it kept many people up at night with the noise from the crushing of the gravel and the operations of the asphalt plant. Once Calgary's Stoney Trail is ready to be paved, I'm hoping that perhaps this may not occur in the late hours of the evening and the early hours of the morning and that the construction and the operation of the plant will just be during the day. Perhaps you can maybe provide me with some information with regard to that.

Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: We do have some visual screening and noise mitigation and things that we can do, but first of all we always wait until it's built. Heaven forbid if an engineer is ever wrong, but our engineers try to tell me that the way everything is designed there, they don't believe that it will be as noisy as people are worried about. But if it is, we're prepared. You know, when we do the tests, if it doesn't meet the guidelines, we would be prepared to put in – 1.86 metres is what we've been running, I think, on top of the berms. Now, mostly for visual, the one that I'm reading about here, they put vinyl slats in to provide screening from view for the residents. I don't know exactly how high they go. It doesn't say on this particular one, but there are areas I've driven by that they'll put those sound walls up awfully high. They usually try to start out by doing it with a dirt berm to keep the costs down, of course. We're such a good, efficient government here; we want to make sure we do that.

I drove over and had a look at that gravel pit. You know, first of all, it's like everything else: you have good things and bad things, and no matter how good things are, nobody wants it in their backyard. That gravel pit has saved Alberta taxpayers probably tens of millions of dollars, having that gravel pit right there at the city of Calgary. We have around 40 metres depth of good gravel in that pit. When I was there the other day, they were taking gravel out. They were into a hole of about a hundred feet deep.

We have a new plan now where we want to move that asphalt plant and stuff down into that pit, so that will get rid of a lot of that noise and clatter and everything else and, hopefully, satisfy your constituents. I mean, in today's hustle and bustle and the fast-paced living that we all live, people do like to rest when they get home at night, and noise isn't the greatest. But we'll do whatever we can.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you for that, hon. minister. I'm quite surprised that you're putting in vinyl slats. I can't imagine that there would be any type of a noise reduction there.

Mr. Ouellette: That's for view.

Mr. Webber: That's for view. All right.

I guess my other issue is with regard to the smell of this asphalt plant. I'm just curious to know what your thoughts are there with respect to the strong smell that my constituents complained about last summer. You can certainly move the operation down into a deep pit, but of course the fumes will rise and the wind will blow them. I'm just curious to know what your thoughts are with that.

Mr. Ouellette: We've actually had them do a bunch of other work with their plant, with scrubbers and different sorts of technologies that they have today, to try to clean up emissions and odour and all of that stuff, so hopefully they will have caught most of the problem. I think it will be ongoing. If there's a real problem, let's find some other way to try to fix it.

4:40

Mr. Webber: Well, great. I appreciate your co-operation there if there are problems. Rest assured, hon. minister, that I will be as diligent as the hon. member across with regard to lobbying you if there are any concerns in my constituency.

Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: I just want to add, being that you two were kind of talking about whose issue was a little more important, that to the Minister of Transportation all Alberta issues are very important.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. How do I follow that? The thought crossed my mind that since all issues in Alberta are important, it's absolutely impossible to prioritize any of them. I don't know.

I am interested and I do want to talk about roads, road construction and road maintenance. I am interested in knowing how the Ministry of Transportation prioritizes projects. I'm hoping that if this is not something that you can explain in the space of the time that we have together here today on the floor of the House, I can get some written answers about this in a timely fashion, within the next two weeks, that sort of thing. I know that for me, having that information would be useful and informative, and it would help me determine why things are the way they are or they are not.

I'll just be kind of random here in my examples. Last summer –

and the Member for Calgary-Foothills was referencing it – there was a fairly extensive repaving program that took place on the Deerfoot Trail through the northern half of the city, very extensive on the northbound lanes, somewhat less so on the southbound lanes. I remember thinking to myself, well, they probably did all the repaving that they could do given the length of the season for paving, and hopefully they'll finish the job this year. The part of the road that you didn't repave certainly is bumpy enough, in this civilian's view, to warrant a repaving job, but I see no evidence that there's going to be any repaving on the Deerfoot this summer. Maybe you just don't have the signs up yet, but I haven't heard a word about it.

You've sort of done sections here and there that have certainly improved the sections that you've done, but the rest of the Deerfoot remains as rutted and rough as it was and as rutted and rough as the stuff that you repaved last summer. There doesn't seem to be any rhyme nor reason as to how you went about this. I thought that perhaps you're waiting on doing some of the rest of it until the ring road is finished, and you're going to do it all as part of a package. Again, I don't know. So that's one example where, just as a civilian, as an outsider looking in, I can't divine the magic formula that the Ministry of Transportation uses to decide when it's going to repave a road and what section of that road it's going to do and what section it's going to leave for later.

It was only a scant few years ago that highway 2 north of the city limits was repaved from, really, the Calgary city limit through to a little bit beyond Airdrie. Now we're doing the chip seal on that paving. That stretch of pavement doesn't seem to have lasted terribly long, and I don't understand why that is. I'm looking here on page 257 of the business plan at strategy 2.2: "Develop a strategy to minimize deterioration of provincial highways, thereby reducing the amount of major maintenance required." I'm presuming that that strategy hasn't been developed yet because I don't see any evidence that you've implemented it.

We've got a lot of kilometres of existing roadway in the province of Alberta that seem to be in need of some fairly significant maintenance. In fact, I'm even looking here at your own projections under Performance Measures about the physical condition of provincial highways. You're showing that over the next three years we will be spending a whack of money, over \$5 billion, on the provincial highway network, and at the end of that we'll have a worse system for it. You know, like they used to say on *Sesame Street*: one of these things doesn't go with the others. Take a stab at answering that if you would, please, Mr. Minister. How do you prioritize these projects?

Mr. Ouellette: I'll gladly prioritize, but before I get there, I'm going to have to say: you know what? I got called on a point of order because I explained the question you just asked at the end. We went through it four times. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre thought that I was not being careful enough or treating you with enough respect, and you came out with the exact same question again. Not this one. I'm talking about the getting worse in five years. I've explained that about four times today already in this, but I'll do it one more time after this.

Mr. Taylor: Focus on the prioritization, if you would, please.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, first of all, I'm going to start with: we have four regions, and we have regional directors in those regions. They bring all their highest priority projects forward, and then it hits the big circle of all of Alberta. It may be a number one priority in a certain region but just doesn't stack up against the criteria in the others.

I guess the most important thing is safety. You know, how safe is it? How dangerous is it? Where do we need it to save having the most collisions? The second is the condition itself, traffic volumes, and to help support economic development of the province. That's basically it in a nutshell. I guess I could get the department to do a draft memo if you want it written better. Then it stacks up against every region. So you go to that criteria in each region, and then they all get dumped into the main circle, and then it does it again.

To get on to your other a little bit, we've never ever tried to hide, as I was saying, that we have a backlog of rehabilitation of roads that drop from good to fair to poor. The optimum, where we believe we should be, is never over 5 per cent in the poor category. We believe it's going to take us 10 years to get to that. I had explained that in the next three years we're still going in the wrong direction. Last year we had the biggest year ever, doing about 1,200 kilometres, I think, of paving in the province. This year I think we're going to do a little more. We know we're going to do at least 2,800 over the next three years, but we're 4,500 in the toilet, you may say. So we have to catch that up, and we're not going to be able to do it. What we are saying is that at the end of three years we'll finally be at a point where we will be able to rehabilitate as fast as they degrade.

Did I miss anything?

Mr. Taylor: No. I think you got most of my points if not all of them.

You know, I'm going to ask a couple of questions based on what you said which probably are going to result in: yes, I would like a draft memo from your department explaining how it goes. Do you use a point system or some kind of scale to rate? Is it consistent across every region? I'm a little concerned when you say: well, you know, the priority projects of the four regions get dumped into the province-wide consideration, and then what might be region 1's highest priority ends up not so high a priority overall. Is there a clear, quantifiable, open, transparent way of measuring that this highway is in great condition, that this highway is in terrible condition, and that these highways are in the middle on a scale of 1 to 10? How do you do it?

4:50

Mr. Ouellette: I've always been told that, yes, they quantify it very closely. I know it doesn't sound very good when I say, "That guy's priorities don't stack up against that guy's," but they all use the same criteria and the same point system. In quadrant 4, let's say – I'm talking hypothetically here – the regional director says, "Hey, I've got 10 as a safety factor." They actually use the numbers of the count, on a traffic count.

You know, we really do look at if it's a gravel highway. We still have about 4,000 kilometres of gravelled, three-digit highways in Alberta, and everybody wants to see them paved or, at the very least, dust controlled. Our safety engineers and our engineering department, at the dollars that we have in the budget today, say: the first flag that comes up to require paving is that they've got to hit 400 cars a day. There's a safety criteria with that. It depends what some of the makeup of traffic on that road is, how many school buses are on that road, that sort of stuff. The first flag to twin a highway is 10,000 cars a day. We don't have that on some of the highways we're twinning, but the makeup of traffic is causing us to say: safety-wise we've got to try to get this highway twinned.

The answer to your question is: yes, they use quantifiable. I've never sat down with them when they're doing it, so I'm going by what my department tells me about how they do it.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Then maybe we can get your officials to do up a draft memo to yourself with a carbon copy to me, and you and I will both know.

I'd like to know – and I don't know if you can get it right down to a specific dollar figure or if you'd put it into a range – the cost per kilometre to rehabilitate an existing highway as opposed to the cost per kilometre to do a new build.

Mr. Ouellette: Well, it's been changing yearly. I think that today we're at about \$300,000 to just rehabilitate. When you've got to go into widening – a lot of our highways that need to be rehabilitated today don't have much for shoulders. When they don't meet today's government specs of highway standards and safety, then you're into a million dollars a kilometre.

Mr. Taylor: That's to widen an existing road as opposed to building a brand new road. What does it cost to build a brand new road?

Mr. Ouellette: There isn't a lot of difference between widening most roads and building brand new roads. It depends on the terrain you're in, how far you have to haul your dirt. If you've got lots of dirt there, if you're fairly level, you can wing up that whole road just about as fast as widening some roads. But in building new roads, it can run anywhere from a million to 2 million a kilometre.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you. That was the impression that I had been under, that that was the price range.

I wonder what the minister can tell me about the way in which we build our highways, and I can even reference what my colleague from Calgary-Foothills was saying about the sound attenuation barriers along Stoney Trail. Of course, the minister's answer, taken right down to its basics, was: "Look. First, we're going to build the road. Then we're going to find out if we need to put up the wall." It seems to me to be indicative of the way we approach road building in the province of Alberta, that we build the absolute minimal road that we need, and then we go back and retrofit and retrofit and retrofit and retrofit. We start out with a two-lane road. We twin it, we put stoplights on it, we put interchanges on it, and we're building that thing, it seems, almost continuously, almost relentlessly over a space of 20 years. I'm thinking about this primarily from an urban point of view but not exclusively. It seems reasonable to predict – and I think, in fact, that this is what's happened with the ring road construction in Calgary and Edmonton to some extent – that in 20 years time here's the road you're going to need.

It makes sense to me that if you build the road that you're going to need 20 years from now today and do a complete design build on it with all the interchanges and all the berming and all the sound attenuation barriers and so on and so forth – well, you might need to change the sound attenuation barriers sometime over the course of the next 20 years – you're going to be able to build that road at considerably less total cost in today's dollars than it's going to cost you two years, five years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years from now, especially if you're in an urban area, where the cost of acquiring the land and doing the design and the build on a major interchange may be considerably more 20 years hence than it is today.

You know, I'm an eastern creep and bum, and I go back to growing up in Ontario and watching the government of Ontario in 1964 and '65 and '66 and '67 – I believe it took them about four years – build a 16-lane expressway across the top of Toronto, the 401, and it still works today. Now, there was a downside. Building a highway that big, they projected out what the total capacity of the

highway would be, and they said: well, we'll get to that in about 2001, something like that. In fact, they got to it in about half the time and ended up having to build another highway north of that, the 407. But the fact is that they were able to build as a complete package deal the highway that they needed, the highway that they envisioned, all at once.

I know, Mr. Chairman, that if they had gone back in five years or 10 years or 20 years to widen the 401 across the top of Toronto, it would have cost them probably, you know, roughly, in terms of the difference between what it cost to build it complete to begin with and the cost of retrofitting – it would have been like doing a recommissioning of some of their nuclear reactors: it would have darn near bankrupted them. So the question basically is: are we being penny-wise and pound-foolish in our approach to highway construction in the province of Alberta? Should we build what we know we're going to need when we start to build it as opposed to doing a bit now, a bit later, and so on and so forth?

Mr. Ouellette: What you're actually speaking about here is almost, "Boy, that would be nice to have," not what we actually really need. We're definitely the other way around on the pound-wise. We are. You talked about building the 401 in the '60s, and it's still being used today and lots of times as a parking lot. We built highway 2 in the '60s, and it's still good today. We today, now, have to start changing some of our overpass designs because of the traffic count that's on them, but other than when you actually hit Calgary or hit Edmonton, it still handles the traffic fine today. So you can say that we've done the same design.

I agree with you a hundred per cent that it would be very nice to be able to say, "We're going to build this today because we know that five years from now or 10 years from now it's needed," but in order to do that, we would have to use up budget and other people, like some of my colleagues and your own were saying earlier today on highway 55 and things like that, have to wait even longer because we would never have the budget to be able to do that.

5:00

So you do what you can do today to make sure people are safe. You spread that out to try to do all the jobs that are needed, and you can never get to them all. You know, that's why P3s have worked so well in Calgary. When the Stoney Trail northwest opens, because of how much traffic has boomed, we will probably have some intersections that are failing the day we open the road because there wasn't enough budget at the time to do it a hundred per cent free-flow freeway. The same thing happened in Edmonton with the Anthony Henday southwest compared to the Anthony Henday southeast.

The Chair: Now I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Lund: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm just going to make a few comments. I found it interesting, the comments that the Member for Calgary-McCall was making about the maintenance and the contractors.

What I've observed – and we live very close to highway 11 so we see what is going on there. The fact is that since it was privatized, there's better maintenance, not less maintenance. There's better maintenance than there was when the government was doing it. If I've got any criticism about what the private sector is doing on maintenance right now, it would be that I see the snowplows out when I wonder what it is that they're snowplowing. You meet them

on the road, and a lot of the way they've got their blade in the air. There are some drifts at intersections and those kinds of things, and that's really what they're out fixing. I don't believe that they're doing a lesser job. As a matter of fact, I know that around Rocky Mountain House the contractor has much more equipment there than when Alberta Transportation did the maintenance.

I heard the Member for Edmonton-Centre commenting about contractors not coming in. Well, you might want to take a drive down 82nd Avenue just west of Bonnie Doon Shopping Centre because there's a bridge rehabilitation going on there. I see a lot of Ontario licence plates on both trucks and other vehicles there, so I suspect there's a contractor doing some work there that's from Ontario.

Getting back to some of the issues that I wanted to raise, I agree with your business plan in the area about driver education and driver safety. I think we do a very good job on the design of our highways and the kinds of things that we need to do to make them fairly safe. But driver attitude is, in my opinion, what is driving these statistics up so much in the area of accidents. As a matter of fact, just last Sunday there was a very serious accident just east of Caroline on highway 54. From everything I have heard about the accident and heard from the people that were in the accident, the vehicle that caused the problem was at a very high speed and attempting to pass where it shouldn't have been and had to duck back in and then went out of control and came across, killing two people, and possibly there may be one or two more deaths in that accident. But it was a real bad one. And that, from what we hear, is strictly driver.

Now, one of the things that I would recommend – and I know the department is doing quite a bit of it. To make rumble strips where there are solid lines on these highways is so important. I know people from around Caroline have been phoning me and saying that they want more signs up. Well, I don't think the types of drivers that are breaking the speed limits and acting the way they are, with absolutely no patience, no consideration of anybody else, are going to read a sign, but they may – they just might – recognize that they're in a dangerous situation if they had crossed a rumble strip.

I don't know what you can do about this one, but I get so annoyed when we get in a long line of traffic, and it happened to me yesterday as I was coming up highway 2, north of Red Deer. There's an overpass over the railway. The bridge is being redone. The traffic was backed up well over two kilometres, probably closer to three. There are big signs there – keep right; keep right – yet these idiots go zooming past in the left-hand lane as the traffic is going slow down the right-hand lane. That just shows the selfishness of many of these drivers and no consideration of other people. Yesterday that took about 20 minutes from where we were, going down to 20 clicks, till we finally got back through, yet these idiots go by, and they probably didn't spend four minutes in the lineup. I don't know what we can do about that. I see that you've gotten them to move their signs further back. As a matter of fact, the one coming from the north looks like it's about four kilometres from the actual construction, but we've got to figure out some way that we can enforce the slowing down of those vehicles in that other lane.

Just another little thing, and I think I mentioned this a couple of years ago, but I've had a number of folks mention it to me since. In our new interchange on the Anthony Henday, if you look at the sign going east, it says: Anthony Henday East. That's fine. The problem is that people are going there that don't realize that the Anthony Henday goes all the way around. You know, that's how you go to Sherwood Park. They don't catch that, so they take that Ellerslie one. If that sign just had an arrow to highway 14 or Sherwood Park or whatever you did there so that they knew that that Anthony Henday is the one that they want to get on to get over there because

it's a long ways if you take the Ellerslie one. That's one little thing.

Another issue has been bothering me. I see in your business plan you talk about the office of traffic safety. I'd like to know more about exactly what that is and how it works. The one area that I found quite interesting – and it's under the strategies in goal 2, 2.7. There you talk about the mandatory inspections, the safety code, and some other good things. I'm curious. In the accidents how many of the vehicles are actually in poor mechanical condition if that's what caused the accident? I have no idea what that might be.

The other one that I'm interested in. In 2.2 you talk about traffic safety programs, including intersection safety devices and hours of service. Where are we at with that monster? Just in the last two weeks we had a bit of an experience with that, and it cost our farm \$300 because the individual was held up at customs. We had a piece of equipment coming in from the States, and he was held up at customs, ran out of time, had to sit for two hours, and charged us \$300 because he was out of time. Those kinds of things are what, I'm really fearful, continually drive up costs for people doing that kind of work.

A couple of other things that I wish that we could take a look at. There's getting to be an ever-increasing number of these very bright headlights, and if you're on a two-lane highway at night particularly, even though in the daytime they're annoying, they are quite blinding, particularly if the vehicle happens to be one that they've lifted the front end and have not adjusted those lights or that they're not dimming. I wish that we would step on them. I think there are some of them that if they're installed by the factory, you can dim them, but there are some jobbers that are causing a huge problem up there, and it's getting to be an ever-increasing problem. You'll see the trucks that they've jacked way up. They're probably an additional two feet up. With those vehicles, also, the headlights are causing a big problem because they don't seem to adjust the beams when they do that.

5:10

One other quick question on the rehabilitation. In many places they're grinding up the pavement and then relaying it. I'd like to know the cost ratio. What's the additional cost of doing that, or is there additional cost to that or using virgin material?

Mr. Ouellette: Really quick because I'm thinking of it right now, on the pavement. I've been told that it costs about the same whether we use recycled pavement or new pavement.

Hours of service is an interesting one. I get beat up pretty good by my own department quite a bit on that one because we and Saskatchewan are the only two provinces who haven't signed off on that. I believe we have a totally different industry in Alberta with our oil industry and our forestry industry and a few others. Still, though, when the agreement was signed way back when at a minister of transportation meeting federally, everybody agreed that they would adhere to the federal regulations. So any trucking companies that are licensed interprovincially are automatically regulated under the federal guidelines for hours of service. About 55 per cent of the trucks that are licensed in Alberta are licensed interprovincially, so they fall under the federal hours of service guidelines. There's nothing we can do about that, but we are working on a lot of things with all the rest of the provinces.

One of the things that doesn't work under hours of service for Alberta companies and for everybody is the 4,500 kilograms. Our Alberta standard right now is 11,794, and under the hours of service guideline it's 4,500. Well, really, a pickup truck could be licensed for 4,500. That means that you could go home on the weekend, and if your three-quarter ton truck has a commercial plate on it and you

just want to load up and go to the mountains snowmobiling or something for the weekend, you'll find yourself stopped on the side of the road maybe because you don't meet hours of service. You've already holed yourself out. All of the rest of the western provinces and everybody now has signed off saying: we need to change this. Manitoba and Quebec are the two kind of sticklers in that one.

There are a lot of other things that we have to get changed within that hours of service, we believe. You know, our forestry industry is in a lot of trouble here now, and you sure don't want to kick them one more time while they're down. That's for sure.

Mr. Groeneveld: How about the farmers?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, the farmers get exempt on a lot of trucking regulations in Alberta, so we don't want to go there right now, I don't think.

Any type of dangerous driving is part of our traffic safety plan or our initiative that's out there. A lot of the things that you're saying, I see the exact same thing on the highway. I tell our own people that if there's a way to educate, maybe even add it into our driver training manuals for truckers, for example. You know, you never used to see tractor-trailer units on the number 2 highway for that one kilometre an hour difference pull out to pass when you're coming out, and it takes 15 kilometres for them to get by that other truck. By the time you get by, you see a couple of kilometres of traffic built up behind you. We're saying that education might fix some of that. We've been through our traffic safety plan, looking at maybe changing some of that within our own traffic safety manuals.

Rumble strips. We're working on them. We're putting rumble strips just about everywhere we can where we believe that we have a safety issue. Lots of the things that you've been saying are really enforcement issues, and we will pass a lot of those messages on.

The Anthony Henday. We'll have somebody look into that, that the signage isn't right, or what we can do for that.

You were asking about the office of traffic safety. It's been established, of course, to ensure that individuals are leading key traffic safety initiatives. The community mobilization strategy has been launched. That initiative will have 16 regional traffic safety co-ordinators, five in aboriginal communities – the rest will be placed throughout Alberta – to have co-ordinated, collaborative community-based delivery of traffic safety programs. Recruitment of the regional traffic safety co-ordinators has been initiated, and several co-ordinators are now in place. There's an enforcement strategy that has been initiated with Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security and Alberta police services to ensure consistent traffic safety enforcement province-wide. All of that's through the office of traffic safety.

Mr. Lund: Well, I appreciate your comments, but I'm really concerned about the driver education. Quite frankly, from what I see, the driver schools that we have now do a good job of teaching people the rules of the road. They do a fairly good job of teaching and showing people how to handle a vehicle, but they do nothing about attitude, and I don't know how we're going to get at that. I believe that the more that we can do in the schools and perhaps programs where young people are shown the results of some of this stunt driving and all those kinds of things that are causing the problems – it's a tough one, but I just don't know how we're going to get at it. I'm worried that just through training is not going to be enough.

Mr. Ouellette: I know that through the department and our officials they've really been talking a lot about: we've got to beef up our

education, how to educate these people. You know, I've been saying all along and I always tell our guys: how do we change driver attitude? I've been to Europe a few times where you can't even dream of traffic here like they move traffic there.

I was in Paris at the World Road Congress last fall. I mean, that one traffic circle there at the Arc de Triomphe is unbelievable. It's like a wagon wheel spoke coming into it. There have got to be eight or nine roads coming into the thing. Then there are nine lanes of traffic in there and no lines anywhere. My own deputy said to me: "You know what? There have got to be lots of accidents there." I said: "Let's go over there and sit there. We'll sit there all afternoon. There's a nice little bar here on the corner." Well, of course, we couldn't spend that time, but we did sit there and have a coffee and watch the traffic circle, and there absolutely was not anything, not even a close call. I couldn't even guess the number of cars that went through there in the hour or so that we were there watching that traffic circle.

5:20

It's straight driver attitude. People pay attention to what they're doing, and they have courtesy for the cars around them. It seems like here we all want to own this space. If we're in this space, that's our space, and nobody else better come into it no matter what we're doing. I don't know how you change drivers' attitudes to actually really want to pay attention. I say the same thing with all of our driver distractions. We've been talking about cellphone use, whether it be hand held or whether it be hands free. There are people that eat in their vehicles. There are people that shave in their vehicles. There are people that put on makeup in their vehicles. All of those distractions have come forward, and let me tell you: attitude could fix all of that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. You have about seven minutes.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. There are really four categories that I want to go over with the minister.

The first. I listened to you listing off pieces of highways that were scheduled, and I didn't hear if there was anything scheduled by way of a passing lane or twinning – I doubt that, but let me try – for highway 2 between Morinville and Clyde corner. I would have thought that that had hit the 10,000-car limit, but let me put that on the table for you. If you don't have the answer, I'm happy to take it in writing. So that was issue one: highway 2 between Morinville and Clyde corner. Hopefully a passing lane, but twinning would be nice. I'll certainly take that.

The second issue. I'm going to go back on the minister's response to me around the building Canada fund. He said that the money was flowing through on the transit, and I ran back and checked.

Mr. Ouellette: It's not the building Canada fund.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. I think the minister is saying that it's not the building Canada fund because that's what I've checked.

Mr. Ouellette: I never said that it was.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, okay. Well, that's the one I was really interested in because that has enough money in it for the city of Edmonton and Calgary, if they each got it, to complete those regional LRT systems that they're looking at doing. Certainly, for Edmonton we're trying to move ahead on that in a big way fast, and we would sure like to see that money. I for one as a citizen here will be some

frustrated if it goes to completing the province's portion of Anthony Henday, for example. It's targeted money that's supposed to go to transit, and I'm hoping that's where it will go.

The third issue was – I'm going back again – about highway maintenance. And thank you for those explanations. My follow-up question on that is: who monitors? Do you have government staff who monitor the implementation of those contracts, and how many people? I mean, I know we're really getting the benefit of the RCMP reporting on problems there because they're driving those highways so much, and the minister said that he has people as well. I'm just wondering how many people are there across the province.

I have two more issues. Red Deer airport. Strategy 3.1 on page 297 of the business plan is around provincial aviation strategies with small airports. I'm wondering if Red Deer fits into the small airport category and what sort of support it could be expecting.

Finally, Fort McMurray and the Radke report. The Radke report said that there were four major interchanges that were needed in that urban service area, which even were a priority over the twinning, and I'm wondering when these four interchanges are going to be finished. The Radke report also talked about the Industrial Heartland, which the minister has also referenced. What specifically is the government doing around that Industrial Heartland sector?

I may not have left the minister enough time to respond to me orally, but I would certainly look forward to them in writing. Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette: I never ever do anything in writing. You know that. I'm just kidding.

Real quick on the Fort McMurray one. Two of the interchanges are going to start this year as we speak. The other two are probably not within the next five.

The \$52 million that I was talking about is called the federal public transit trust, nothing to do with building Canada. If you want to talk about building Canada, you've got to talk to the hon. Deputy Premier. I'm sure he'll be glad to take you for coffee or whatever.

The maintenance contract. We have 70 to 80 people that supervise our maintenance contracts within the regions.

Red Deer airport. The Red Deer airport always fit under the small airport stuff. Last year they actually hit their numbers moving, so they are now getting regional status because they got money from the feds.

The Chair: I hate to interrupt the hon. minister, but the time allotted for consideration of your department's estimates has expired.

Now I would like to invite the officials to leave the Assembly.

Hon. members, please get back to your seats.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee recess until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the committee adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Wednesday afternoon, May 14, 2008

Introduction of Visitors	707
Introduction of Guests	707
Members' Statements	
Cancer Day of Action	708
Bertha Clark	708
Crime Reduction and Safe Communities	709
Access to the Alberta Legislature	709
Emergency Preparedness Week	717
Urban Development Institute	718
Oral Question Period	
Health System Restructuring	709
Role of Opposition Parties	710
Vehicle Seizures	710
Support for Child Care	710
Beef Recovery Strategies	711
Policing in Provincial Parks	711
Seniors' Benefit Programs	712
Highway 55	712
Medications for Mental Health Treatment	713
Women's Equality	713
Water Quality in Fort Chipewyan Area	714
Impact of Gasoline Prices on Tourism	714
Farm Worker Safety	715
Postsecondary Education Funding	715
Unpaid Wages	715
Technology Commercialization	716, 717
Emergency Preparedness	716
Home Renovation Contractors	717
Presenting Petitions	718
Notices of Motions	718
Introduction of Bills	
Bill Pr. 1 Young Men's Christian Association of Edmonton Statutes Amendment Act, 2008	719
Tabling Returns and Reports	719
Tablings to the Clerk	719
Committee of Supply	
Main Estimates 2008-09	
Transportation	719

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