



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 21, 2008

Issue 22a

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 21, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. We give thanks for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the ambassador of Benin, His Excellency the Honourable Théodore Ahimakin. With the ambassador is the honorary consul designate of the Republic of Benin, Mr. Larry Parks. This is the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta since assuming his role in February of this year. It was my pleasure to host a lunch for the ambassador earlier today. Benin has worked hard to become a stable, responsibly governed, and growth-focused country. It is a model for western Africa on how to transition to democracy. I would kindly ask our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a visiting delegation seated in your gallery from the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, or PNWER. With us today we are pleased to have PNWER president State Representative George Eskridge from Idaho, PNWER past president the Hon. Jim Kenyon, Yukon's Minister of Economic Development, and last but certainly not least, PNWER's longstanding serving executive director, Matt Morrison. Accompanying them is David Kettles, director of U.S. relations for Alberta international and intergovernmental affairs. Alberta supports regional co-operation through PNWER in increasing the economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens of the region. I'd now ask our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of guests that I'd like to introduce today. First, on your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you Paulette and Anthony Lashuk, who participated in a tour of the Alberta Legislature earlier today. Paulette and Anthony are formerly from Edmonton and are now living in Goose Lake, right on the edge of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, where they are enjoying their retirement. They are seated in your gallery this afternoon. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, it's great to introduce to you and through you a group of 28 students from Niton Central school in my constituency of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. They are sitting in the public gallery. With the group is Maryann Varty, their teacher, many parents and volunteers, and the teacher's aide, Robin Verbeek. I'd ask all members to join me in giving this group a traditional warm welcome to the Assembly.

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

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you Stephanie Schuurman from Vancouver. She's sitting in the public gallery. She's originally from Edmonton, sir, and she studied two years at the Augustana faculty of the University of Alberta in Camrose, which is where I got to know her. She's now at UBC studying a bachelor of music with a major in secondary education. She's only home for a while, though. She's preparing for her wedding in June to my son, Erik. It's a great delight to have her here. If she'd rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Erika Barootes. Erika will be working in my Calgary constituency office this summer as part of the STEP program. Erika has a passion for government and politics and is currently enrolled in the co-op education program at the University of Calgary. Like so many young Albertans Erika volunteers in her free time for the Progressive Conservative Party and, in particular, has an interest in Calgary-Varsity. She also volunteers with the Calgary Drop-In & Rehab Centre. Erika is in the members' gallery. I'd ask that she stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Benito: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very special guest. With us today is Mr. Robert Rogers, program director of the Alberta Mycological Society. Mr. Rogers teaches herbal medicine at Grant MacEwan College and has authored 14 books on medicinal plants in Alberta. Mr. Rogers is part of the group that has been instrumental in developing Alberta's very own proposed official mushroom emblem. I would ask that Mr. Rogers stand now to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Transportation, you should have 120 young people in and about the building.

Mr. Ouellette: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce them to you and through you to all members of the Assembly even though they're not in the House just yet because they won't be here during introductions. I think it's so important for these bright kids to visit the Legislature. As you know, they will become tomorrow's leaders. There are 110 students from Innisfail middle school who are touring right now. I just had a picture taken with them, and they said they knew they'd enjoy their tour very much. They will be in the House around 2 o'clock to watch a small portion of question period.

Just to let you know how sharp the stars are that the Innisfail schools bring, we have an hon. member amongst us that just joined, our member from Red Deer-South, who went to school in Innisfail. Look at how bright they become, and they become leaders.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce the teachers and parents that came with this group. The teachers are Mrs. Judy Bourne, Mr. Grant Klymyk, Mr. Carey Collin, and Mrs. Della Lastiwka. The parent helpers are Mrs. Dawn Peters, Mrs. Carrie Black, Mr. Grayson Beardsworth, Mrs. C.J. Copeland, Mrs. Kerr, Mrs. Daines, Mrs. Bannister, Mrs. Connors, Mr. Sparrow, Mr. McGillivray, Mr. Layden, Mrs. Osazuwa, Mrs. Pols, and Mrs. Shierman.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a delegation led by a constituent of mine, Mr. Rana Singh. He has real estate developers here from India who are exploring Alberta's vast potential and opportunities. I'd like to introduce Mr. Rana Singh, Mr. M.R. Khatri, Mr. R. Khatri, Mr. Surjeet Singh, Sarvjeet Singh, and Mr. Omkar Jamjua from Edmonton-Ellerslie. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

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

Chinook Primary Care Network

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak to this Chamber about a success story from the Chinook primary care network in southern Alberta. As you know, the primary care initiative is one of the ways the government is using innovation to improve access to health care. Primary care is a team approach to health care that involves not just physicians but pharmacists, nurse practitioners, dietitians, and other experts who take a big-picture approach to health care. Doctors still diagnose and care for patients, but they are assisted by highly qualified experts who can take care of some of the workload for them.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that the Chinook primary care network has seen tremendous success in just two years. On average CPCN physicians have increased access by 50 per cent. That means more patients get an appointment without waiting. By introducing asthma education initiatives, they've managed to reduce emergency room visits by as much as 78 per cent. Some physicians have managed to reduce wait times for an appointment to same-day service.

Primary care is also saving lives. I know of four southern Albertans who were diagnosed with early stage colon cancer thanks to reduced wait times for colonoscopies. Because their cancer was caught early, those folks were able to receive the treatment they need, and now, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to say those people are cancer free.

I believe that when we improve access to health care providers, whether it's a physician, a pharmacist, a dietitian, or a nurse practitioner, we improve the lives of all Albertans. We also address the very real challenge of providing sustainable health care in an era of spiralling costs. Throwing money at this problem will not solve it; innovative thinking will.

Mr. Speaker, I hope this Chamber will join me in congratulating the Chinook primary care network and all such networks in Alberta and wishing them continued success in the future.

Thank you.

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

Walking Away Hunger Campaign

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the great success of a project that, actually, I initiated a couple of years ago. Three years ago now we started the Walking Away Hunger campaign. This is a campaign that involves young people from various ethnic groups; however, it's led by the Sikh youth of Calgary.

Over the years we've raised \$52,000 in food and financial contributions for the Calgary Inter-faith Food Bank. This past weekend at the annual Vaisakhi parade in Calgary the young people gathered 10,770 pounds of food, which is over \$21,000 worth of

food. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the young people raised upwards of \$18,000 to help build a new food bank depot on the east side of Calgary.

I am absolutely delighted, and I'd like to acknowledge the work of Mandeep Sran, Jessie Singh, Soni Bal, Gaggan Khangura, Pavan Buttar, Jasmeet Nijjer, Sandeep Sran, and Harsimranjeet Singh Brar. I'm absolutely encouraged by the potential our young people have when they come together for these absolutely wonderful causes and bring out their best by uniting in the best of human unity.

Thank you, sir.

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

Ele Gibson

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to pay tribute to a tireless advocate for the less fortunate in our society, Ele Gibson. Ele is beginning her well-earned retirement after 19 years working as the resource director of the Bissell Centre, a not-for-profit agency benefiting those in need in Edmonton. She was the voice of the Bissell Centre and is an articulate and compassionate advocate for those whom she served.

Ele began volunteering for the Bissell Centre in June of 1989 and was hired full-time two years later. She has served the Bissell Centre and its clientele in many capacities throughout the years. In addition to serving as the Bissell's spokesperson, Ele was the donor relations manager and newsletter publisher. Her optimism and communication skills are unparalleled, and her ability to relate to everyone made her an invaluable asset in raising donations, both monetary and in kind, for the people she has so ably served.

Ele's resourcefulness was vital to the well-being of her clients, especially during the winter months in times of scarcity. Last winter she organized a campaign requesting coffee and warm clothing, and the Bissell Centre ended up with cases of coffee and enough socks, gloves, and toques to last into the next season. Those supplies were welcome indeed to the Albertans who needed them most.

Over the past two decades Ele Gibson has become a fixture in Edmonton's downtown core. Her determined efforts to raise awareness of inner-city issues have improved the quality of life for both her neighbours and for the many people who have received the services of the Bissell Centre. Her kindness and the diligent manner in which she provided for others will be sadly missed and will not be forgotten. I would like to wish Ele and her family all the best in the future.

Thank you.

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

Lorelei Crawford

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary's Bowness high school has a variety of program options for students, including languages, sciences and social studies, athletics, fine arts, and a strong emphasis on technology, options that capture students' imaginations to encourage them to stay in school.

Pride and excellence best describe the school's commitment to program delivery and in developing a strong community of educated, morally and socially responsible citizens. But the success of Bowness high could not have happened without the dedicated and innovative tutelage of its teachers. These teachers are committed to their role. They're committed to the education of their students. Their primary focus is to create an environment and vision within each student to complete their high school education.

Today I recognize but one of these top teachers at Bowness high

school, Lorelei Crawford. Lorelei believes that people were born to move, and thus the Bowness high school dance program has been established as one of the premier programs in Calgary. To Bowness high school, thank you for giving Lorelei Crawford the opportunity to share her inspiration and exceptional dance program talent. To Lorelei herself, congratulations on being chosen to receive the 2008 excellence in teaching award. It's an award of recognition that you truly deserve.

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

Infrastructure Needs

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the May long weekend behind us we are now heading into what is typically Alberta's rainy season. Today's rainy weather across the province is just the start of what is three to four weeks of persistent rain sandwiched with the odd day of sunshine. While many regions within the province welcome this intense precipitation at this time of year for fire relief or agricultural practices, other regions brace for what may be the potential consequences from the intensity of the precipitation.

Early last June several communities in Calgary were subjected to a very intense rainstorm. Of these communities, the community of Capitol Hill, which is part of the Calgary-North Hill constituency, was hit particularly badly. Flooded houses and commercial property, damaged roads, power outages, fires, and other various damages to infrastructure were a result of this storm, that dumped close to 10 centimetres of rain in this city in just one night. Expenses for cleanup and repair from this storm from both government insurance and personal coffers likely reached the tens of millions of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Capitol Hill appreciate the \$40 million provided by this government to compensate municipalities and homeowners affected by heavy rains last June. Further, citizens of Calgary also appreciate the efforts of hundreds of emergency responders that provide a great deal of comfort during these chaotic and sometimes nerve-racking events. While I know that extreme events of nature are very hard to predict and control, I would like to suggest that last year's storm should remind us that we need to prepare. Many inner-city communities, like Capitol Hill, have aging infrastructure, in many circumstances not built to handle the capacity of the substantial growth in our province.

I would like to commend the government for addressing these concerns through the 20-year capital plan and the in-year surplus policy. However, I'd like to encourage us to do more for these communities, who are paying higher and higher property taxes only to see their schools close for new suburban schools and resources funneled into new infrastructure over the maintenance and renewal of aging infrastructure.

Thank you.

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

Draft Land-use Framework

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development announced a significant step forward in the evolution of land-use planning in our province. Albertans have asked for a planning framework that better balances our environmental, social, and economic needs and provides greater certainty for decision-makers. The draft land-use framework does this. It provides a strategic blueprint for all levels of government and for all Albertans as we make decisions today about the province

we want in the future. The draft framework proposes better tools, processes, and resources to make the right decisions. At the same time, it respects personal property rights and the decision-making authority of local governments.

1:50

The purpose of the land-use framework is to manage growth, not to stop it, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have told us they want stronger provincial leadership on land use and a sustainable balance between development and conservation. They want more co-ordination on land, air, and water policies in our great province.

Albertans are grateful for the natural wealth and beauty they've inherited, and they acknowledge their collective duty to pass this natural bounty on to the next generation as good or better than they received it. We have a great opportunity for national, even global leadership on sustainable resource management, and the implementation of the land-use framework will provide an important avenue to demonstrate this leadership. The minister, his staff, and all involved parties are to be commended.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Draft Land-use Framework

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are glad to finally see a draft of the land-use framework. The minister has raised appropriate concerns about water, water quality and quantity, and Albertans' quality of life under the current approach. Climate change and water decline require us to properly manage and prevent further damage to our lands even before the land-use framework is further implemented. However, there does not appear to be a commitment by the government to do so. To the minister: given that there is a potential for a huge rush for new development projects now to get in before the framework is in place, is the minister prepared to apply the principles of the land-use framework in the interim until it's fully implemented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View still seems to think that the Alberta economy is like a merry-go-round, that you just hit a button and you stop it all of a sudden. You don't. In the real world lots of people invested lots of time and money and lots of plans into ongoing commitments, so you don't just stop things all of a sudden. But I have absolute confidence that the processes and rules that are in place will continue to apply to any new development. Most of the MDs I've consulted with are onboard for the direction that we're headed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No one is talking about stopping growth. We're talking about managed growth to prevent further, irreversible damage in the interim, between now and when the implementation of this framework takes place, which could be five years from now. To the minister: why is there no commitment to slowing growth?

Dr. Morton: Well, it's encouraging to see that the hon. member is

now getting close to the page we're on, which is managing growth, responsible growth. Glad to see that. As I said earlier today at the news conference, the MDs and counties, the AUMA, the AAMD and C, that we consulted with, want provincial leadership on many of these issues. There's been a bit of a policy vacuum there, and the decisions made in the interim by municipal leaders, by local decision-makers are going to reflect the principles and priorities that are identified in the land-use framework.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. Well, cumulative effects are precisely the right approach to new developments, not a project-by-project decision, which has been the past way. Will the minister require the Energy Resources Conservation Board now to make project decisions based on cumulative effects? If not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I almost blush with the compliments from the member opposite, and I'm glad that he agrees with our approach of cumulative effects analysis. The Energy Resources Conservation Board is, obviously, not immediately in my jurisdiction or my purview, but I'm sure they will be aware of this, and the Minister of Energy may have communications with them.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March 2003 the government released its Water for Life strategy, which provided specific strategies and actions to manage our water resources. However, this strategy has never reached its potential due to the lack of resources, political will, and authority at the level of the water advisory committees. The evidence is found in the 2008 Alberta Water Council strategy review. We are concerned that this extremely important land-use framework will also be implemented unevenly and incompletely as a result. To the minister: will the minister commit to a quick and full implementation of the land-use framework to avoid the problems we have seen over the last five years with Water for Life?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by saying that I can't think of a single more successful initiative that this government has undertaken in the last eight years than the Water for Life initiative. Everywhere I go in the province, whether it's Foothills-Rocky View, my own constituency, or others, I meet the local watershed groups that have been formed pursuant to this that are working with the government, with industry, and with the MDs to monitor and improve water quality. If he's concerned whether the land-use framework will be as successful as the Water for Life strategy, I'd be very happy if it were.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the major problems with Water for Life, of course, was that the advisory planning councils didn't receive adequate support, both financial and technical, and no authority to implement their recommendations. Will any new regional advisory partnerships be given the funding and authority needed to deliver an integrated land-use plan?

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, I may have to take back my earlier compliment. It would appear the hon. member didn't have time or didn't read correctly the draft framework. This framework does not create a new permanent level of bureaucracy like the old regional planning commissions. There'll be the land-use plan for each region, but the existing local authorities – cities, towns, and MDs – will be the decision-makers. There's no new layer of bureaucracy like the member opposite seems to want.

Dr. Swann: Not at all, Mr. Speaker.

Since a key component of the land-use framework will be monitoring and enforcement to ensure that the provincial policies in legislation are in fact being followed, what compliance mechanisms will be put in place along with the land-use framework to ensure that the plans are actually being followed?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, one of the really important new initiatives of the land-use framework will be a land-use information database available not just to government but to industry and nongovernment organizations to know what land use is happening and what's happening on the land. I'm completely confident within this context that the concerns the member opposite has will not develop.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are very pleased – and I hope I don't make the minister blush again – that so many subversive Liberal ideas are being utilized in the new land-use framework. A cumulative effects approach to planning, regional plans as advocated in last year's Liberal Bill 211, cabinet level approval of regional plans: all Alberta Liberal ideas. It remains to be seen, though, if the political will on the other side is strong enough to see this strategy through because some members over there have spoken rather strongly against what this strategy intends to do. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. On June 4, 2007, the President of Treasury Board stated in this House, speaking about Bill 211 and regional planning . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: We're way over, so why don't we recognize the minister.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'll look forward to the next question. Thank you.

Mr. Taylor: I don't think the President of Treasury Board should say that about his own quotes.

He said on June 4, 2007, that this is "creating another level of government that most municipalities don't want." How does the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development intend to address this very real concern of the President of Treasury Board?

Dr. Morton: It would appear to me that the land-use framework achieves exactly what the minister of Treasury Board wants to avoid. There is no new middle tier of government. We're not resurrecting the old land-use planning commissions. There will be the regional plan for each region, and that plan will be implemented by the existing towns, cities, and municipalities.

Mr. Taylor: Let's keep going. On the same day the President of the Treasury Board stated on behalf of municipalities, "I believe they

would see it for what it is, which is forced amalgamation . . . that is not where this government has come from.” To the minister. Are you planning to force amalgamation? Is that where this government is coming from?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, again, they must be so busy on the other side that they don’t have time to read the draft report. The word “amalgamation” doesn’t appear anywhere in the text of the report. They’re just asking speculative questions.

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

2:00

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We’ll all take turns trying to make the minister blush.

While development takes place at runaway speed, the government has presented a land-use plan that will take years to have any impact. While they plan to make a plan, the government is allowing development to continue in sensitive areas that will create problems that will plague future generations. Numerous reports have warned about the negative impacts of unchecked growth, but the government has still failed to listen. My question is to the minister. Will the minister admit that unplanned, uncontrolled, chaotic growth will produce unplanned, uncontrolled, chaotic effects?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I thought my friend across the way here was the leader of the New Democratic Party, not the Green Party of Alberta. I would have thought that the leader of a party that claims to represent working men and women, unionized or not, might see some benefits in the type of economic growth and activity that this province has enjoyed over the last decade and that has made thousands, tens of thousands of working men and women proud homeowners and part of the Alberta advantage.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Some of us, Mr. Speaker, are surprised that this hon. minister ended up in the Progressive Conservative Party.

I would like to ask: why has the minister failed to put interim measures in place which would limit the negative effects of uncontrolled growth until the land-use framework is finalized, a process that may take up to five years?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, it would appear the hon. member doesn’t understand the merry-go-round analogy that I referred to a moment ago. The Alberta economy does not have a stop/start switch. We have existing measures in place that deal with all major new developments, and the direction and the spirit of the land-use framework will be part of the interim decision-making that takes place.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I do understand the merry-go-round effect because I’ve asked this minister questions lots of times.

I’d like to ask the minister whether he believes that water shortages, tent cities, lack of affordable housing, traffic delays, and urban sprawl should be allowed to continue to proliferate while it takes up to five years to implement the land-use framework.

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, judging from the results of the last election, it would appear that not many Albertans agreed with that critique of our great province.

Thank you.

Pacific Northwest Economic Region

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, or PNWER, plays an important role in the economic development of North America’s northwest. The regional transboundary co-operation that exists between all jurisdictions has been very advantageous to Alberta. Alberta is an exporting jurisdiction and an economic powerhouse for energy in North America. My first question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Given that Alberta was the cofounder of this partnership many years ago and has been a driving force in it, what is his department doing to ensure that Alberta continues to be a driving force with PNWER?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Mr. Stevens: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is quite right. It was about 20 years ago that a former member of this Assembly, Jim Horsman, was a cofounder of what ultimately became PNWER. One of the things that I am doing to ensure that it remains vital is to have this particular member appointed as one of the representatives of Alberta on the PNWER committee.

We are currently hosting PNWER here in Alberta. They were introduced here earlier today. PNWER is very valuable in terms of addressing regional issues such as border issues, economic opportunities, and we continue to be strong supporters.

Mr. Mitzel: Mr. Speaker, my first and only supplemental is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Given the co-operative effort that exists in my area in southeast Alberta, where a local regional economic development alliance has a direct partnership with a similar economic development association right across the border in Montana, do you think there’s any way that this type of arrangement can also be successfully duplicated elsewhere in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we’re looking forward to more of this cross-border or out-of-the-box thinking. Up in the Peace River region, for example, with people in the Montney region that’s developing in northeastern British Columbia, there are some opportunities beyond the borders in tourism and infrastructure. I think that in geographic regions, as our Premier has often said, the lines that divide us from other provinces are imaginary and the opportunities for the people to collaborate are huge.

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

Oil Royalties Price Cap

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the price of oil went over the \$130 a barrel mark.

An Hon. Member: Good news.

Mr. MacDonald: It certainly would be good news if we were collecting a fair share in royalties, hon. member.

Now, my first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is it necessary now to have a price cap of \$120 per barrel on our new royalty structure?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, you very well know, as do, I’m sure, all of the members of this Assembly, that I’ve answered this question at least three times in this Assembly. I don’t believe it deserves another answer today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how much is this price-sensitive cap going to cost Albertans in lost royalties if the price of oil remains over \$120 per barrel? Answer that.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, the reality of this thing is, quite honestly, that if you put an infinite ramp in place and continue to collect additional, additional, additional, additional royalty taxes, whatever – the income tax system is exactly the same. You reach a level at which you pay a percentage of income tax. You don't continue to pay income tax ad infinitum until the government collects 100 per cent and leaves nothing for anybody else.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. What level we have reached is a new level of incompetence in the Department of Energy.

How long does the price of oil have to stay above \$120 per barrel before this government will consider changing it?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, a point of order, please.

The Speaker: Okay. We'll deal with that at the end of the Routine.

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

Draft Land-use Framework

(continued)

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A key recommendation of the draft land-use framework is the introduction of six regions based on watershed and municipal boundaries and the corresponding regional plans to be developed in consultation with regional advisory councils. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister explain why the proposed boundaries for the province's six planning regions were set up the way they are and the benefits of moving to the six regional councils?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar is correct: the proposed boundaries for the six new regions are congruent with the boundaries of the watersheds of the major rivers in Alberta. This will allow us to do water quality planning and land-use planning together, in combination. Obviously, what happens on the watersheds affects the quality and quantity of water. The land-use framework, really, completes the good work that was begun by the Water for Life project in 2002.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the same minister. As the minister knows, I spent a great deal of time working with many other Albertans giving input into the land-use framework. I want to, first of all, commend the minister and the department on the level of consultation across the province. My question is: will the draft land-use framework impact Alberta's strong tradition of local governance and government and local authority, and if so, how?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar in her former capacity as a mayor was part of the consultation process, and what we heard from her and other municipal leaders was: preserve our tradition of strong local decision-making, but provide provincial leadership. That's what the land-use framework does. There'll be provincial leadership on key issues of balance, water, and air quality, but decision-making will remain in the existing localities. There will be no new heavy-handed bureaucracy out of Edmonton dictating things to our local government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: could the minister please explain how the role of the proposed regional advisory committees differs from the old regional planning commissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new regional advisory councils will provide interim advice to the provincial government, to the land-use secretariat in designing the regional plan. They'll bring local views, values, and priorities into the regional plan. But once that regional plan is agreed upon and approved, the regional advisory councils will be dissolved. So what we have is provincial leadership, continued local decision-making in the application of laws, and no new tier of bureaucracy.

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

2:10 Anthony Henday Drive Interchanges

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Noise levels on Anthony Henday Drive in the west of Edmonton are too loud. The failure to replace signalized intersections with free flowing interchanges ensures that local residents are constantly subjected to the noise of engine retarder brakes on large trucks. In October the Premier told the city of Edmonton that funding would – and I quote – be considered in our next budget, end quote. But that funding is not there, and it's not in the three-year capital plan. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Why is this government not constructing the interchanges?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as we speak, we're finishing up the functional planning on the Stony Plain Road interchange, and they're continuing on the other ones. As fast as we can get that done and our budget permits, we will be trying to move ahead as fast as we can on interchanges.

Ms Blakeman: That's interesting that they're not in your plan at all.

To the same minister: given that there are police, there are sheriffs, and there are transport officers on this road, why isn't there sufficient enforcement of the laws preventing the use of engine retarder brakes to the level that lets the neighbours sleep at night?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, we don't have a law within the traffic safety plan that takes safety measures away from vehicles. Engine retarder brakes are a safety braking device on a tractor-trailer unit. We do ask avoidance of using retarder brakes for the comfort of all citizens.

Ms Blakeman: I would have thought it was a noise abatement problem here, but okay.

Again to the Minister of Transportation: since the Premier is already talking about off-budget surplus spending before the budget has even been passed, can Edmontonians expect that these additional intersections could be approved from that windfall money as soon as possible?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, it's great that our Premier cares about all Albertans and wants to make sure that we can make quality of life better. We can move things forward as fast as we can because of the great royalties that we get within this province. It's great that we may have a surplus, and we may be able to accelerate our road systems to make life better for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Draft Land-use Framework

(continued)

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The wealth and high quality of life we enjoy in Alberta are to a large extent because of our resource industries, like oil and gas, forestry, and coal. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Can the minister explain how the recently released land-use framework is going to affect our resource industries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to repeat again that the objective of the land-use framework is not to stop growth but to manage it. Good environmental protection isn't cheap. The best environmental regimes in the world are usually found in the most prosperous societies in the world. We intend to keep Alberta a prosperous society. What the land-use framework will bring for industry is more predictability, more certainty, and less conflict, using things like integrated land management, the system we're already using in public lands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. How is the integrated land management planning going to fit into the regional land-use plans of the framework?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, we've been using integrated land management already in public lands. It's worked very successfully co-ordinating different industrial users on the same land and reducing the footprint through that device. I can report, for example, that in the Kakwa-Copton area in the northwest integrated land management has resulted in a 45 per cent reduction of linear disturbance. The land-use framework will build on this success.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement is again to the same minister. How are you going to be able to get industry working together through the land-use framework?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, this government has been consulting with industry in the development of the land-use framework, and we'll continue to consult with industry as we go through the consultation

process in the next six months and the implementation. Will industry get everything it wants? Of course not. No sector is going to get everything they want, but what industry will get in the end is greater certainty, greater predictability, and reduced conflict on the land.

Proceeds of Crime

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, by this fall two investigative teams acting under civil law will have the ability to lock down houses used for marijuana grow operations for 90 days, and I give mad props to the Solicitor General for doing so. However, in B.C. similar laws are utilized to seize these houses and sell them, with proceeds going to the province to fund victims of crime initiatives. My question is for the Solicitor General. Can he tell us whether and when similar action will be taken in Alberta?

The Speaker: As long as it's not dealing with your budget, sir.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There already is proceeds of crime legislation under the federal government. However, that being in place, we are looking at putting something in provincially under civil law which would give us similar powers to what the province of B.C. has.

Mr. Hehr: To the Minister of Justice: do our proceeds of crime provisions and other provincial statutes currently allow such measures to be utilized right now?

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, remember that the purpose of question period is not to interpret law.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've discussed in Committee of Supply, there are a number of pieces of work that we're now undertaking with respect to proceeds of crime legislation, and I won't speak to the specifics of the legislation at this point.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, since the B.C. government has prevailed in 30 of these situations and seized more than \$4 million in cash and personal property, surely Charter of Rights issues aren't a problem. Can I get a commitment and a definite time frame from those ministers responsible to take similar action?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that question. We have a process in place that's dealing with the development, passing, and proclamation of legislation, and we'll proceed in due course.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Legal Aid

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we learned that legal aid in Alberta is struggling to represent the poorest Albertans. At the same time the system doesn't even pretend to support regular-income Albertans who face second mortgages or financial ruin if they require extensive services. In the words of the Deputy Premier when he was Attorney General, "legal sticker shock is putting more than just our lowest-income citizens at a tremendous disadvantage in accessing the courts." To the Minister of Justice: can the minister tell us how middle-income earners can access justice when they can't afford a \$200-an-hour lawyer?

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

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that there are a number of challenges that a number of families in Alberta face. I don't want to speak to the specifics of individual files. I must say that we are very concerned about the provision of legal aid to people that can't afford it. Right now in Alberta, if a family makes less than \$2,300 a month, they're entitled to support to help get a lawyer. I'm not going to speak to why a person who may make more than that or may be a middle-income Albertan needs a lawyer. I'll leave it to them to work with counsel to find a way to pay their bills.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Chief Justice of Canada, Beverley McLachlin, has spoken publicly about the hardship placed on middle-income Canadians who are not eligible for legal aid, will the minister consider expanding legal aid access for middle-class Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Chief Justice of Canada has spoken quite eloquently about this issue. It's certainly an issue that engages all of us. It's something that we talk about in many fora. There are different ways for people to access legal advice. The fact is that receiving legal advice is a service that can be paid for. There are also programs in place to help people that can't afford that. That's the way it works here.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Given that yesterday the minister described an unwillingness on the part of many lawyers to provide legal aid at one-half to one-third of the regular cost, will the minister commit to removing access to justice from the realm of charity and increase the hourly legal aid rate accordingly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Redford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would take exception to the word "unwillingness." I don't recall using that word. I think that it is a challenge in the legal community for people to provide services. I congratulated lawyers yesterday who were prepared to provide that service. I met this morning with a number of lawyers that provide those services. They are certainly willing to provide those services, and people in Alberta receive those services.

2:20 Draft Land-use Framework
(continued)

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, the recently released draft land-use framework promotes greater conservation and stewardship of our ecosystems and biodiversity on private and public land. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What kind of policy approach does the draft land-use framework take towards conservation and stewardship?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clean water, clean air, healthy habitat and riparian areas, abundant wildlife, and healthy fisheries: these are all public goods that all Albertans enjoy. Yet in

Alberta 30 per cent of these are on privately owned land. In the white zone in southern and central Alberta 70 per cent of the land is privately owned. If we're serious about protecting these public goods that all Albertans enjoy, we can't just leave the cost of carrying these public goods on the shoulders and the pocketbooks of our ranchers and farmers. There needs to be a partnership.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how will the draft framework assist those landowners, who often bear much of the cost of conservation and stewardship on their land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The partnership that the land-use framework proposes to build is precisely a partnership between government, the private sector, and our ranchers and farmers, the landowners in the private sector in Alberta. We proposed a number of programs that are market based and that respect the interests and the property rights of landowners yet provide a way to share the cost of protecting that critical habitat.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister. Can the minister provide some specific examples of market-based tools that could be used by land managers on public and private land to offset conservation and stewardship costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to provide a few examples, and there are many more in the draft land-use framework, which is available to all members and all Albertans as of today. I would point to things like tradeable development credits that direct development away from environmentally or conservation-sensitive land into other less desirable land and thereby preserve open spaces. Land trusts combined with conservation easements can preserve important environmental areas or open spaces in urban and rural areas. Land conservation offsets are a third option that can be used to protect an area where development undoes another area. All of these will contribute to the quality of life of all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Kindergarten Programs

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October 2003 the Alberta Commission on Learning recommended that full-day and junior kindergarten be implemented. The Minister of Education has acknowledged that full-day kindergarten pilot programs have been successful, but a province-wide program is still only being considered by the government. Five years later there really should be a decision. To the Minister of Education: will your government implement junior and full-day kindergarten programs for at-risk students province-wide?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, we visited this question previously this session in the Legislature. Obviously, one of the mandates that was given to me by the Premier at the time of my appointment was to deal with issues around at-risk students to make sure that they have the opportunity to fully explore their educational potential and to succeed in school. One of the issues around that would be an early start for those children whom that early start could benefit, and we will be considering that and other programs in terms of helping children at risk.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. It really has been five years since we've been talking about that, and it was the government's own recommendations that said that it should come into play. These first years have such a profound effect on the schooling experience of a kid going forward, and we know that we have decreased high school graduation in this province. What is the delay on this?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it wouldn't be fair to say that it was the government's own recommendation. It was a recommendation of the Alberta Commission on Learning, ACOL. At the time the recommendation was reviewed by government and wasn't accepted because of the very real concerns of many parents across the province that young children, perhaps as young as age four, would be on buses for inordinate lengths of time. That's why it wasn't proceeded with at the time. But as I've indicated to the House and to the hon. member, it's quite appropriate for us to look at junior kindergarten and kindergarten in the context of helping at-risk children and developing a program of that nature if it is the way to go.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. You've just made the perfect argument for why we should have community schools and how important it is that kids go to school in their own community.

Could we get a commitment to a timeline when these programs will at least be put forward and, certainly, an implementation date?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, it's part and parcel of the mandate letter that was provided to me. I expect that the Premier will want me to demonstrate some progress on that mandate this year. I anticipate being able to report back to this House where we might be going with respect to at-risk children. I think it also begs a discussion that we can have with Albertans about Alberta as a learning society and about the types of things that we need to do to make sure that all children have the opportunity to be successful, and I expect we'll do that over the course of the next year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Advanced Education Opportunities in Northern Alberta

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For quite some time now postsecondary institutions in northwestern Alberta don't seem to have a clear mandate on who's offering what programs. Alberta students need to know which institutions best suit their needs so they can make a clear choice about where they need to go. My question is for the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. How are the roles of these institutions being clarified to avoid any confusion?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had a very, very productive meeting last week with the board members and chairs of the Grande Prairie Regional College, NAIT, and Northern Lakes College. I must say that it was Campus Alberta at its best because those three boards sat down and determined what the roles and mandates of the three institutions should be in the northwest. They determined and agreed, all three boards, that the stewardship role for

the northwest region will be divided between Grande Prairie Regional College and Northern Lakes College based on traditional areas of responsibility. When I talk about stewardship, I'm talking about identifying program needs in the community, ensuring the quality, and being responsible and accountable to taxpayers and students.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, having enough trades workers in the Grande Prairie region is a constant struggle. My second question is for the same minister. What kind of impact will this have on training for more apprenticeships and tradespeople?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is very, very correct when he says that we have a fairly significant demand in the northwest for tradespeople. In the past three years we've added close to 900 apprenticeship and technical training spots in the north and will continue to do so to respond to the needs. By doing the stewardship roles, we'll be able to get a better determination of what those needs are and where the programming needs to be. We're looking forward to working with all three institutions in the north to continue to do just that.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, my third and final question is for the same minister. I know that NAIT was offering programs in this region. Can the minister tell us if NAIT will continue to do so?

Mr. Horner: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. NAIT is one of our pre-eminent apprenticeship training institutions in Canada, let alone Alberta. Certainly, NAIT will continue to deliver programming within the region in perhaps a brokerage relationship with Grande Prairie Regional College and Northern Lakes. The outcome of the meetings that we had last week was that there will be no negative impact to jobs in the area and there will be no negative impact to the apprenticeship training in the area. In fact, we look forward to some expansion perhaps in the Fairview area and in Grande Prairie in exactly those areas that the community is looking for.

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

Utilities Consumer Advocate

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The role of the Utilities Consumer Advocate in the representation of Albertans is unclear. While the Minister of Energy states that the UCA will not be the only advocate for consumers in utility matters, the UCA is claiming that it should have primacy in hearings. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Could the minister please explain how the primacy that the UCA is claiming will allow other consumer groups to be fairly represented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Utilities Consumer Advocate for the province of Alberta is with Service Alberta.

With respect to the Utilities Commission the new legislation that's in place very clearly states that any individual that wishes intervenor status on any applications before the AUC may certainly apply to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the Utilities Consumer Advocate claiming this primacy position in spite of what was promised in Bill 46 when it is also stating that it doesn't have the capacity to undertake that role?

2:30

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I think there's a bit of misunderstanding there, actually. If you look at Bill 46, there clearly is a role for the consumer advocate with respect to intervening in a normal course of events, and they do have a mandate in legislation to do that. That in no way curtails other people's opportunities to intervene if they so wish.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Central Alberta Rural Electrification Association states in a letter to the Alberta Utilities Commission that they, quote, have no confidence whatsoever, end quote, in the UCA and with the 45 per cent dissatisfaction rating in the UCA the last time it was measured, how does this minister propose that the UCA will work on behalf of consumers if they have no confidence in it?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that I have absolute confidence in the new Alberta Utilities Commission. Bill 46 was well crafted and designed to put in place a utilities commission that works to the best advantage and for all Albertans. I look forward to many years of progressive work with that commission.

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

Commercialization of Nanotechnology

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government announced the nanoWorks program, with \$15 million in funding for nanotechnology projects. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Can the minister tell us how this program will benefit Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The nanoWorks program is one part of the strategic plan to grow the nanotechnology sector in Alberta as we create and work towards, as the Premier calls it, the next generation economy in Alberta. This will ultimately benefit Albertans by diversifying that economy and providing high-quality jobs in the nanotechnology field, in which we have a significant investment in the infrastructure. This is an investment in turning that infrastructure into reality and jobs for the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what accountability is there that this program will be effective?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the nanoWorks program is being administered by the Alberta ingenuity fund, which has a wealth of experience in looking at scientific investments and the review process and peer review. Evaluation committees will be established to review the applications and to ensure that funded projects are doing what they were intended to do and to meet the high standards of the program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: can the minister tell us what the state of the nanotechnology sector in Alberta is?

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, the nanoeconomy, if you will, is some 21 trillion dollars globally. Alberta is shooting for a small portion of that. But in this particular nanoWorks program we're teaming with industry and with research. The Alberta nanotechnology industry now includes approximately 45 companies, and they have annual revenues in excess of \$300 million to date. We're looking to grow that considerably, and that will benefit all Albertans for many generations to come.

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

Sexual Orientation and Human Rights

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit indicated in no uncertain terms that this government would not add sexual orientation to the enumerated list of protections already granted in human rights legislation. To the minister. History has shown that when a minority group such as disability or race is listed as a protected ground of discrimination, the members of that group gradually suffer less prejudice. Can the minister tell me why race and disability are currently enumerated grounds but not sexual orientation?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, as I've said in this Legislature before, we are going through a review of the entire Human Rights Commission. Issues of sexual orientation will be looked at if and when we decide to implement new legislation.

Mr. Hehr: Mr. Speaker, these Albertans deserve equal protection under Alberta law. In fact, they need it more now than other minority groups in Alberta today. To the same minister: when considering the effectiveness of our human rights legislation, how does this minister explain to a gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgendered, or transsexual individual the current decision of this government?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I will explain to Murray Billett, who's an advocate for gay and lesbian rights in this province, later on this afternoon, they are protected under legislation now as mandated by the Supreme Court decision. Right now on any type of complaint they are respected and they are protected, and we will continue to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I know from personal experience – and possibly the minister may well know through his own personal experience – individuals in minority groups look to their government to protect their legal rights. Why is this government not leading the fight to protect people of differing sexual orientation from discrimination?

Mr. Blackett: As the hon. member says, yes, I understand from personal experience what discrimination is all about. The very thing is that it's protection for all Albertans that we're concerned with, not just one particular group. There are advocates for other groups, for all Albertans irrespective of race, colour, or creed. I've said before

many times in this House that when the time comes, after we've gone through and made sure that the process works for all Albertans, we will look at the legislation, and we'll look at making changes to help those particular groups.

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

Major Community Facilities Program

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first question, to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit again. Our government's two-year major community facilities program is entering its second year. With escalating construction costs in Alberta, this program has become oversubscribed and will not be able to meet facility needs in Alberta's urban and rural communities. How does the minister plan to address this issue?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, the major community facilities program is helping to manage growth pressures and build strong communities across Alberta. However, the member is correct: the program has exceeded the amount of funding that we have for this year. The program allowed for \$140 million last year and \$140 million this year, but we have already 184 applications requesting a total of \$424 million for projects totalling \$1.96 billion. I will be speaking with my colleagues later this year to see if we can continue this great program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with two-thirds of Albertans living in the capital region and Calgary, what steps are you taking to ensure that funds from the program are distributed evenly across the province?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, funds for this program are available to all Albertans. I was just at a cheque presentation last night in Claresholm. We've identified four different sectors in the province: Calgary, Edmonton, rural, and other cities. Twenty-five per cent of the funding goes to each one of those groups equally.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms DeLong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the same minister focuses on accountability. I'm wondering how we can find out what projects have been funded. Is this information available to the general public?

Mr. Blackett: As of March 31, Mr. Speaker, 87 MCFP grant applications had been approved for a total of \$147.7 million. Once formal agreements have been completed and the organizations have received and cashed their allocation, information on individual projects is posted on the Alberta lottery fund website.

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

Student Transportation Costs

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Education. With the cost of fuel rising, it's getting more and more expensive to operate bus services to get students to school. Given these rising expenses, what is the minister doing to ensure that our school boards can afford to keep school buses on the road and get our students to class?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a fuel price contingency fund being provided, that has been provided since September 2005, to supplement the regular transportation funding that's provided to school boards. Budget 2008 earmarked \$19.5 million in ongoing fuel contingency. Essentially, we fund jurisdictions for every cent that the average monthly pump price for diesel fuel exceeds 60 cents per litre. Adjustments are made each month to the school boards' funding allocations as the price fluctuates. We also increased this year transportation funding to school boards by \$16.6 million for a total of \$263.3 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. Again to the same minister. Many Alberta parents opt to send their students to schools of choice. Can these students count on the government to provide transportation funding to get them to class as well?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the School Act school boards are required to provide transportation services for resident students who live more than 2.4 kilometres from their designated school within their attendance area. Funding is allocated to school boards to address the costs of providing this level of service. However, parents can choose to send their children to a school other than the designated school. We do not provide transportation funding for students to attend a school of choice, so if a student enrolls in a place other than their designated school, they may have to pay for the cost of transportation.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. My final supplemental to the same minister. I hear from my constituents that they're being charged fees for transportation. At what point can school boards charge fees to cover student transportation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated, we fund school boards for transportation of children to their designated school if they're 2.4 kilometres away from the school. School jurisdictions can provide enhanced transportation services. They can provide transportation services to students to a school of choice or to students within that 2.4 kilometre radius. They can charge for those services, and they can on their own policy basis basically assess the student charge to all students in the jurisdiction, but they have to treat all students within the same policy framework.

The Speaker: That was 112 questions and responses today. In just a few seconds from now we'll continue the Routine.

Presenting Petitions

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I have a petition signed by a number of individuals from St. Albert, Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Calmar, Stony Plain, Calgary, and

Sherwood Park, all of them asking the government to establish a public inquiry into the administration of the local authorities pension plan, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

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

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

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

This petition is signed by people from all over the province, and this adds to the thousands of names that have already been presented.

Thank you.

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

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have some petitions to present to the House, and they are signed by people from Calgary, Edmonton, Wetaskiwin, Breton, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Airdrie, and Strathmore. They are also calling for a public inquiry into the Alberta government's 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-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by over 40 Albertans right across Alberta. It reads:

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

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Bill 18

Film and Video Classification Act

Mr. Blakett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 18, Film and Video Classification Act.

Mr. Speaker, this act will replace the Amusements Act and will regulate public film exhibition and classification in Alberta. Bill 18 will encompass aspects of film exhibition, classification, distribution, and legislative enforcement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 74.1(1)(a) I would move that Bill 18, the Film and Video Classification Act, be referred to the Standing Committee on Community Services for its review and that this committee report the bill back to the Assembly in the fourth week of October 2008.

The Speaker: Under such provisions that particular motion is not amendable or debatable, so I'll call the question.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture and Community Spirit.

Bill 19

First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Amendment Act, 2008

Mr. Blakett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Amendment Act, 2008, for first reading.

Mr. Speaker, the amendments in Bill 19 achieve the formal and legal repatriation of 15 long-term loans of sacred ceremonial objects between Alberta Blackfoot First Nations and the Royal Alberta Museum between June 1998 and August 2001.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Bill 20

Agriculture Statutes Repeal Act, 2008

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 20, the Agriculture Statutes Repeal Act, 2008.

This act will repeal three acts: the Agricultural Societies Amendment Act, the Gas Distribution Amendment Act, and the Federal-Provincial Farm Assistance Act. The first two acts have never been proclaimed, Mr. Speaker. The third act is addressed by other legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 20, the Agriculture Statutes Repeal Act, 2008, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Bill 21

Heating Oil and Propane Rebate Act

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 21.

The Heating Oil and Propane Rebate Act will repeal and replace the Natural Gas Rebates Act. All the rebate programs that were introduced in the 1980s under the Natural Gas Rebates Act have been discontinued for 20 years except for rebates for heating oil and propane purchases for those Albertans that do not have economical access to natural gas. The provisions in the existing act applicable to the non-existent programs will be repealed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 21, the Heating Oil and Propane Rebate Act, also be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings this afternoon, and they're all from residents of the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. These residents are writing regarding Alberta's labour laws and advocating what they would like to see as major changes to encourage fairness to all working people in Alberta. These constituents are Debbie Gregory, Mitchell Miller, Joe Dellapina, Real Morin, and Elsie Grafe.

Thank you.

2:50

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. First, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Cecily Mills encouraging the government to take positive steps on a variety of issues, including the environment, employment, affordable housing, and keeping Alberta nuclear free.

I would also like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from five Albertans, all calling for changes to Alberta's labour laws to create a fairer labour relations climate in the province. The letters are from Robert Thrall of McLennan, Serena Brown of Fairview, Linda Brown of Girouxville, Lena Ouellette of Donnelly, and Amanda Pollard of Spirit River.

Finally, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of comments made by the Deputy Premier when the Deputy Premier was Minister of Justice and referred to in my questions today, in which he referred to the "sticker shock" of legal fees.

Thank you.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Energy, you caught my ear earlier in the Routine indicating you wanted to rise on a point of order.

Mr. Knight: Yes.

The Speaker: Proceed with citations.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much. The hon. member across the way in asking a question of me spoke of "a new level of incompetence" of a department which I lead, and by association I feel that that indicates a slander on myself personally. My citation would be under the standing orders 23(c), (f), and (j). Mr. Speaker, 23(c): "needless repetition." This particular issue has been discussed many times in the House, and I've given, I think, adequate answers with respect to the issue. Also, under 23(f), the estimates for my department have just been completed, and there were all kinds of opportunities for the member opposite to address that or any other issues regarding the royalty collection system at that point in time. We had good opportunity there, we had a vote with respect to the issue, and I think that under 23(f) that's covered.

Standing Order 23(j): using "insulting language." Mr. Speaker, this member opposite calls himself a shadow minister, yet he persists

– persists – in referring to the public service employees in a very derogatory manner. I think that constitutes a point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on this point of order.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I would certainly indicate to the House that I did not refer to the hon. minister as incompetent in the questions. You have to realize that there is a certain leeway in question period. I was speaking clearly of the entire department, not the minister. I'm sorry if I offended the minister, but I don't think I have violated our standing orders.

Certainly, the minister is correct: this issue has come up before. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has asked questions about this. The hon. leader of the third party has asked questions about this. Since that time things have changed. The price of oil has gone well beyond the price-sensitive cap of \$120 per barrel. In fact, before question period, at 20 after 1, when I had a look, Mr. Speaker, it had jumped by over 3 and a half per cent today to the last price that I had before me of \$133. Times have changed with the price of oil since the last time this matter was dealt with in this House. It would be my view that I have every right to ask that question.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others who want to participate?

Okay. Well, we've heard all of the arguments back and forth, and the chair is quite prepared to rule on this purported matter of a point of order. The conclusion basically is that this is not a point of order. Clearly, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did not refer to an individual. The use of "a new level of incompetence" or a high level of incompetence are phrases that are used and have been used for centuries in the parliamentary mode and will probably be continued. These are phrases that are used as part of the whole argument; it goes back and forth.

There was no allegation against the member. In this case the minister had no imputation of any motives that I could see against him. While somebody might argue that it shows disrespect to an individual, there is no individual being referred to here. It's not the first time that a whole department would be viewed as incompetent; it's been said before. That does not violate any type of rule. It may be insulting – absolutely – but it's not unparliamentary with respect to this. Should there be derogatory remarks of such nature that would cause the chair to move, the chair would move and intervene with it.

The question about being repetitious and this being a violation of 23(c), well, today there were nearly seven or eight questions that went on the land-use policy. If one listened very attentively to these questions, one could almost argue that they seemed to be quite close to one another. Once again, there's a new day every day in a parliament, and there's a new situation with respect to it. It may be the basic subject matter, but there's always some little connotation that makes one day different from the next.

Time is precious in a parliament. Ingenuity and creativity are very important to the question. Ingenuity and creativity are also very important in the response.

So we're going forward with Orders of the Day.

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

Solicitor General and Public Security

The Chair: I would like now to call on the hon. Solicitor General to open the debate.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present an overview of Alberta's Solicitor General and Public Security's 2008-2011 business plan and Budget '08 estimates. Following my presentation I'd be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

I will touch briefly on my ministry's five core businesses and how Budget '08 supports our mandate of reducing crime so Albertans feel safe in our communities. Solicitor General and Public Security's 2008 budget increased \$64.5 million over last year's comparable forecast to \$582 million. Included in this year's budget is \$26 million for salary increases, inflationary pressures and \$16 million in new funding to address key recommendations in the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities report. By 2010-2011 total program expenses will be \$620.4 million, a \$102.1 million or 19.7 per cent increase over those three years.

I'd like to begin breaking down these numbers for you by talking about one of our core businesses, law enforcement and crime prevention. Enforcement is an essential part of fighting crime, and we are bolstering front-line police ranks across the province. The total budget for policing programs is \$270 million, up 11.9 per cent, or \$28.7 million, from forecast. This includes \$7 million for a hundred new front-line police officers. This is the first year of a three-year commitment by our Premier to add 300 new officers. This year \$164.2 million will go to a provincial policing services agreement by which the RCMP are contracted to provide policing to the province, and \$3.2 million of that funding is going towards more provincial RCMP front-line police and support services. These positions will help the RCMP keep pace with Alberta's population growth.

3:00

We're also increasing funding for First Nations policing by almost \$700,000 this year, to about \$10 million. This funding covers inflation for existing community tripartite agreements and for two new such agreements, one with the Morley First Nation and a second with the Saddle Lake First Nation.

Our funding for municipal policing will rise by almost \$1 million, to just under \$48 million, to help keep pace with the population growth in Alberta.

Budget '08 also includes \$12.2 million in new funding for the sheriffs branch, which plays a vital role not only in law enforcement and crime prevention but in another of our core businesses: providing protection services for officials, facilities, infrastructure, and investigative services. The increase in the budget for this branch allows us to add more sheriffs for traffic enforcement, for court and perimeter security, and for the safer communities and neighbourhoods investigative unit. Adding 21 traffic sheriffs brings the total to 105 as we continue to crack down on aggressive drivers and speeders throughout the province. Many of these new sheriffs were on the highway during this last May long weekend. Between September of '06 and the end of March '08 sheriffs handed out over 100,000 tickets and helped take more than 400 suspected impaired drivers off our roads.

The addition of 30 sheriffs responsible for court and perimeter security helps ensure the safety of judges, staff, inmates, and all Albertans using the court system. Last year our sheriffs prevented more than 10,000 potential weapons from entering courthouses across the province.

Fourteen new sheriffs will be assigned to the safer communities and neighbourhoods investigative unit. Two teams will support safer communities by targeting and shutting down properties used for criminal activities such as gangs, drugs, and prostitution; \$2.9 million has been allocated for SCAN, which will be operational this fall.

Sheriffs are also tasked with ensuring the safety of government officials, including the Premier; co-ordinating intelligence information on counterterrorism through the Alberta Security and Strategic Intelligence Support Team, ASSIST, in partnership with federal agencies, provincial partners, industry, and Alberta's police services; apprehending fugitives at large in Alberta through the fugitive apprehension sheriffs support team, FASST; and providing investigative support for ongoing and serious criminal investigations by providing surveillance assistance to police services across Alberta. The expanded role of sheriffs supports and complements the work of police, allowing them to concentrate on more serious crime in the communities they serve.

This is only one part of our mandate to better co-ordinate and integrate all levels of law enforcement in Alberta. Other initiatives we're currently working on include a new policing framework, the development of a network radio system for all emergency responders, and a comprehensive IT strategy to support law enforcement. These are critical components in our fight against crime as we work to provide Albertans with safe communities in which to live, work, and raise their families.

Equally as important is another of our key core businesses, which is the custody, supervision, and facilitating in the rehabilitation of offenders. Budget '08 puts an additional \$17.7 million, or 9.8 per cent, into correctional services for new programs and to enhance existing initiatives. This brings funding for correctional services to \$198 million for '08-09. Most of the increase, more than \$14 million, will go to cover salary settlements and inflation; \$3.2 million will go to hire an additional 30 probation officers to enhance supervision and support for offenders in the community to help them break the cycle of crime and become contributing members of society.

Correctional services is also reallocating funding to address a number of priorities within its department, including setting up a new inmate disciplinary process, instituting an audit standards and investigative unit, and enhancing training for probation officers and correctional peace officers.

Mr. Chairman, I've been speaking about law enforcement and custody. The other side of the equation involves another of our core services: supporting victims of crime. Budget '08 provides \$25.5 million for victims of crime. This includes a \$4.3 million, 20.6 per cent, increase over forecast. The increase will provide victims programs with a \$3 million boost, for a total of \$10.4 million. Another million dollars will be used for the victims of crime financial benefits program, an increase of 8.6 per cent to \$13.7 million. The rest of the increase, about \$200,000, will be used for salary settlements and administrative costs.

We recently announced details of new funding which will see more money flow to programs that provide critical front-line support to victims. Since Budget '07 funding for victims and victims programs has risen by \$7.5 million, or 20 per cent. We are committed to supporting victims of crime during what is usually a difficult time in their lives while ensuring that they are treated with dignity and respect.

Our final core business is the regulation of liquor and gaming in Alberta. We do this through the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, which ensures that the gaming and liquor industry operates effectively, with integrity, and in a socially responsible

manner. Government revenues from liquor sales are budgeted at \$680 million in '08-09. This revenue helps support the programs and services provided to Albertans.

Government shares of net proceeds from VLTs, slot machines, and ticket lotteries are placed in the Alberta lottery fund. This year payments into the lottery fund are budgeted at \$1.5 billion. Thousands of public and community initiatives benefit annually from the Alberta lottery fund. Some examples include community facilities, libraries, athletic events, arts and cultural groups, seniors groups, and historical resources. This year the Alberta lottery fund is budgeted to provide over \$90 million to support addiction prevention and treatment programs, an increase of \$6 million.

Social responsibility in the liquor and gaming industries is emphasized through education and enforcement. The newly developed ProTect program designed for security workers in licensed venues will be implemented beginning in this '08-09 year. This one-day course provides a comprehensive overview of the duties and responsibilities of venue security as well as strategies for how to deal with trouble before it turns violent.

We're also enhancing the enforcement of Alberta's liquor and gaming laws. This year the AGLC is adding seven inspectors to increase enforcement activities and to address one of the recommendations of the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities report. As well, the AGLC board has recently increased the specified penalty structure for liquor violations for licensing establishments in an effort to reduce overconsumption and unlawful behaviour. Public awareness programs, including the second annual Responsible Gambling Awareness Week . . . [Mr. Lindsay's speaking time expired]

The Chair: Minister, would you like to briefly introduce your staff before I recognize other members?

Mr. Lindsay: Please. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I continue, I would like to introduce staff who are with us today: Brad Pickering, our Deputy Solicitor General and Deputy Minister of Public Security; Mr. Bruce Anderson, assistant deputy minister, correctional services division; Brian Skeet, assistant deputy minister, public security division; Jim Bauer, assistant deputy minister of corporate services; and Ann Hammond, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission executive director of corporate services. Several other members of my staff are also seated in the members' gallery: Maureen Geres, my current executive assistant; Cathy Kiss, who will be taking over as my executive assistant shortly; Paul Leeder, the deputy minister's executive assistant; and Andy Weiler, the director of communications.

The Chair: Now I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. You know, just before I get going, I think if I just let the Solicitor General finish his presentation, I'm sure he's got a couple more points. Or were you just about done?

3:10

Mr. Lindsay: Just a couple more yet.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. If you want to just finish those, and then I'll go on with mine.

Mr. Lindsay: Okay.

Mr. Hehr: You can finish your report, and we'll go from there. We'll just go back and forth on time anyway.

The Chair: Proceed.

Mr. Lindsay: All I have to do is find them, Mr. Chairman.

To continue on, the AGLC board has recently increased the specified penalty structure for liquor violations.

I want to speak about public awareness programs, including the second annual Responsible Gambling Awareness Week and the opening of another eight Responsible Gambling Information Centres in Alberta casinos. We'll continue to help Albertans make informed decisions about their gambling activity and provide avenues for seeking help from AADAC. Our government is also committed to learning more about gambling and using this knowledge to influence policy development. To support research on gambling in Alberta, the Solicitor General and Public Security ministry has budgeted \$1.6 million for gaming research.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, our 12.4 per cent increase in Budget '08 provides Albertans with more law enforcement resources, enhanced supervision of offenders in our communities, greater support for victims of crime, and socially responsible gaming and liquor industries. Together these initiatives and programs I've highlighted will help promote strong and vibrant communities and reduce crime to ensure that Albertans feel safe.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for allowing me to finish my remarks.

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. In my very brief time here in this House I would like to thank the Solicitor General for extending to me the courtesies and opportunities to discuss with him the various and ongoing issues in our battle against crime. We all share the same goals: to make this province safer and more vibrant for our families and our children growing up. I'd also like to thank the Solicitor General's staff for putting together a very comprehensive report. They were very professional again this morning in our budget analysis. I'd just like to point that out as well.

Moving on to more the nitty-gritty of what this is all about, I realize that, you know, we have a growing gaming industry here in Alberta. In fact, I've often thought that the department of gaming should really reflect the department of gambling. Nonetheless, I digress already, so an end to this.

I know that the goal of this is to balance choice. I believe the words are integrity, accountability, with a balance of choice and responsibility. I understand choice and responsibility. People should be allowed to do what they want with their own money and be responsible for their own needs. But I was just wondering how the Solicitor General's department balances choice and responsibility and whether it's true or is a perceived notion that it's 80 per cent of the same people going into the casinos day after day, spending too much money that they can't afford, because of addiction. Can the minister advise the Assembly what the department's and the AGLC's overall responsibilities are to Albertans in providing not only gaming opportunities, or gambling opportunities is what it looks like, but also to recognizing support for some of the addictions that maybe this industry is causing?

Moving on – and you can just answer these in a group – if you could provide to me in as much detail as possible what rigorous evaluation and licensing processes the business plan is alluding to. I believe that's towards the beginning of the report. I know that I myself can go to maybe five or six casinos all within a 20-minute

drive. I live in downtown Calgary. It is a growing industry. You know, what is our casino capacity? How many casinos do we need in the province of Alberta? Have there been any studies done to look into actually how much gaming we have going on in this province?

I'll stop there and let the Solicitor General try and answer some of those questions before I proceed.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In regard to the first question on social responsibility. As I mentioned, in our budget this year AADAC will receive \$90.5 million for prevention, education, and treatment of alcohol, drug, and gambling related problems, so this is an increase of approximately \$6 million over the last year. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission has also taken action to encourage responsible gaming in the province. The inaugural Responsible Gambling Awareness Week was held in '07-08 with a theme of Always! Set a Limit; Stay Within It. This event provides the AGLC with opportunity to highlight current and new responsible- and problem-gambling education programs. It was very well received.

Within the AGLC a social responsibility division actually develops and maintains initiatives and policies to reduce the risk of problem gambling. We have the casino and REC voluntary self-exclusion program. It allows participants to voluntarily agree to be excluded from entering our casinos and racing entertainment centres. We also have the responsible gambling program to help staff in licensed premises with VLTs and staff in casinos, racing entertainment centres, and bingo halls to become aware of the issue of problem gambling and the value of promoting responsible gambling. A lot of our machines remind the players who are using them how long they've been on the machines.

We have spoken about the Responsible Gambling Information Centres. We're also looking at the possibility of putting hostesses in some of our casinos so they will recognize those people who are there on a regular basis. When they get to know them, they'll have the ability to talk to them, and if they do have problems, they'll be able to point them in the right direction. I mentioned before the Gaming Research Institute, again \$1.6 million, to study the effects of gambling and gaming and come forward with some recommendations as to how we can ensure that those who are in trouble get the help that they need.

In regard to the business plan for new casinos, I think there were three, possibly four that came on stream last year. There are still two or three under construction. We actually have on hold right now any applications for additional casinos until we have an opportunity to review the effect of these casinos on the industry in the province, so right now there is actually a hold on new casinos.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I think to follow up on the research grants being done, I believe that you said \$1.6 million. It was an increase this year. Have there been any reports that have been given to the department to date on the social costs of gambling, what actually the total revenues are to the total costs? I know these are tough to eyeball, but has your department received any of that information? If it did, would it be willing to share it with the members of the Legislature? I think if we just handled that question, then we can move on to a different section.

Actually, just one more thing. I asked earlier this morning – and maybe we can deal with this now if your department has this. I realize one of the arguments for having casinos within the province is to keep gaming dollars in the province. I was wondering if any

studies have been done, actually, as to whether this is, in fact, the case. For some of the people I see in casinos – and maybe I'm generalizing; maybe I'm not – the next time they go to Las Vegas will be the first time they go to Las Vegas, okay? Have we had any studies to say gaming revenue would be leaving this province should all of a sudden we have fewer casinos, less availability on that front?

If we could handle those two, then we can go from there.

3:20

Mr. Lindsay: In regard to the Gaming Research Institute and the \$1.6 million that we fund them, since 1999 our government has funded that institute for its research into gambling: its impacts and best practices. A key component of a new agreement with AGRI is a jointly developed multiyear strategic research plan which better directs the research to be sponsored by the AGRI. Examples of high-priority research that we've identified would include the economic impact studies, which would be the socioeconomic impacts, costs, and benefits; gaming and social responsibility; again, identification of best practices. Our government will continue to rely on credible research to help make sound policy decisions regarding social responsibility.

In regard to the question, first of all, a lot of these studies are available on websites. It's not only through AGRI but there are a number of other gaming research institutes around the country that publicly publish their research. Of course, we review that, and it is available to the public. So there's lots of information out there, which also helps us form the basis of how we respond to some of the concerns that are out there.

In regard to gaming dollars staying in the province, I don't believe that there are any studies, that I'm aware of, that have been done in that regard. I know from my own experience that a number of people that I know who used to make ventures down to Las Vegas, et cetera, now stay right here in Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thanks. If we sort of continue on at page 261 of your business plan and, basically, strategy 8.2, to "conduct regular reviews of policies in consultation with stakeholders to ensure the integrity" et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Who exactly are the stakeholders that you're meeting with in these sessions? To continue on that line, what has the ministry identified as service delivery that is done "in a socially responsible manner consistent with the expectations of Albertans"? That might be some more of what you've just gone into, so if you feel you've answered that to the best of your ability, that's fine.

Just a question. From my understanding of what is happening in our gaming community, that we're in fact becoming a bit of a gaming culture, why has funding for research not increased, in particular with what I maybe see out there as a problem with gambling addictions, to examine the long-term effects that gaming has on our communities? How is that \$1.6 million figure sort of arrived at, and is it justified? Should there be more?

Also, in the survey that you mentioned there, 37 per cent of Albertans felt that the \$1.5 million for research was too little. I just throw that in there as an additional arrow.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, again, I want to point out that from information that we have, approximately 2.5 per cent of the people who gamble could be considered problem gamblers. You know, we're quite cognizant of that, and we monitor that to make sure that those numbers aren't going up. Hopefully, in the future we'll see them come down.

The \$1.6 million has been, as you indicated, a fairly steady stream of money to the Alberta Gaming Research Institute. I guess in the

last couple of years we've put more direction to them in regard to the kind of research that we believe will help us make sure that our gaming practices are as socially responsible as we can make them. Again, we will monitor results of the requests that we'll be making to them this year. If we feel that they require more money than what we're giving them, we will look at that at that time.

Mr. Hehr: Can the minister tell us how much is provided from the Alberta lottery fund to horse racing in Alberta, how much is going to horse racing to support that industry, and whether it's a practice they'd see continuing, I guess, in the future?

Also, if we go down to strategy 9.3, it says, "collaboration with the gaming industry, other jurisdictions." I'm asking: what other jurisdictions are you sort of partnering with to accomplish this goal? If there are any new initiatives, what are these new initiatives that have been developed, and when will they be implemented?

At strategy 9.4 it says to "evaluate current responsible gaming initiatives." What are the outcomes of some of these evaluations? What evaluations have taken place?

How does the Solicitor General propose to enhance the voluntary self-exclusion program? I'm just wondering if the Solicitor General is aware that similar measures in other jurisdictions have been less successful if not adequately enforced. How does the AGLC plan to improve enforcement of self exclusion? Will this just be done through the casinos themselves trying to do this? Will there be some sheriff support or other support in the future? I'm not sure. If you could comment on those.

Mr. Lindsay: First of all, in regard to the horse-racing entertainment centres the purpose of putting those centres in at the racetrack is to support the operating and capital costs of racetrack facilities, breed improvement initiatives, and then purse enhancements. With the number of casinos that have been built in the province, we noticed that for horse racing their membership, or the people who went there for entertainment, was dropping off. It is an industry in our province – I can't remember, but it's thousands of people who work in that industry – so we wanted to keep it viable. That's why the horse-racing entertainment centres were put in there. So really what they are, in essence, is similar to a casino that operates within that facility. Again, the funds that come out of those entertainment centres come because of people going to the horse races. If the horse racing wasn't going on in the province, those facilities wouldn't be there, and that revenue stream wouldn't be there. Of course, they take a percentage of the profits from that to sustain that industry.

In regard to strategy 9.3 in Alberta we believe that we all have a role to play in being socially responsible for the AGLC. This means developing and applying policies, regulations, best practices. It also means development of information and programs that encourage players to gamble responsibly. The AGLC also collaborates with the industry stakeholders such as AADAC, government ministries, and gaming industry stakeholders in the development of new initiatives that promote and encourage responsible gambling.

The AGLC has a number of consumer awareness and industry training programs that play a vital role in the AGLC's commitment to social responsibility. These programs would include such things as developing a responsible and problem gambling strategy intending to guide the development and delivery of responsible and problem gambling programs in a co-ordinated, collaborative, comprehensive, complementary, and sustained manner; also, increasing the number of casino and racing entertainment centres that have Responsible Gambling Information Centres – again, that speaks to increasing the gaming centres, not increasing the number of casinos – implementing and utilizing new technology as it

becomes available, and continuously reviewing and updating our industry training programs to ensure their effectiveness.

In regard to strategy 9.4: evaluating current initiatives to assess their effectiveness in encouraging responsible liquor and gaming behaviour. Again, we continue to evaluate the bingo responsibility gambling program. We have an ongoing evaluation of Responsible Gambling Awareness Week, which I spoke to earlier. We also conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Responsible Gambling Information Centres and player awareness terminals and evaluate the delivery method of responsible gaming and liquor service training programs to determine if an online delivery of the course content is desirable.

3:30

The Chair: We are going into the second 20-minute period, so go ahead. Continue on, hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Thank you very much for that. I realize that some of my questions are a bit redundant, so I apologize. Nevertheless, just keeping on the gambling theme, I was wondering if you had an exact number, if you could trace how much money is going directly to support those initiatives. If you don't have it now, if you could get that, break that down for me, that would be most kind. You can do that in writing at some point in time.

There's just another thing. I don't know whether this information is already provided elsewhere, and if it is, you can just direct me to it. Do we have an accurate list available somewhere of groups, societies, or organizations that received funding from the Alberta lottery fund? Is this published somewhere so that I can go take a look at it, or do I have to ask it of your ministry through this process?

I've also recently heard through the grapevine – and the grapevine isn't always correct – that the major initiatives program, that is administered by the Alberta lottery fund, is going to be brought to an end in 2009. If this is true, is this going to be changed to some other program? What do you envision for replacing this initiative, or is it simply going to go by the wayside?

I think that's good for right now.

Mr. Lindsay: Okay. To respond to the first question about how much money goes to support the initiatives on social responsibility, that number is around \$7 million. The list of receivers of the funds I don't have at my fingertips here, but that's certainly available, and we'll get that over to you.

Lottery programs. My ministry looks after collecting the money, and it's turned over to the community services ministry. They decide on the programs with regard to how that money is invested in the province, so you'd have to ask that minister on that program. I really don't want to comment any further on that. I'm certain it's going to still get out to communities whether the program format changes or not, but again that would be more appropriate to that ministry.

We also have in the lottery fund estimates by ministry included in the business plan there, so those are already available to you.

Mr. Hehr: Maybe I just didn't hear the first time. Did you give me the horse racing, exactly how much could be traced to horse racing? I just didn't hear that. Maybe you can't do that, or you can look at it later on.

Mr. Lindsay: Yes. The number that goes back into Horse Racing Alberta from lotteries is \$48 million.

Mr. Hehr: Forty-eight million?

Mr. Lindsay: Yes.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you.

If we just switch gears here and go to the victims of crime fund, my understanding is that right now there's about a \$40 million surplus in that account. It is also my understanding that there are many groups that are currently seeking funds from that victims fund, and I'm wondering whether you'd comment. With that surplus and with these groups needing the money or allegedly needing the money, why is this money not going to work? If you guys aren't going to use it, simply send it to the heritage savings trust fund or something like that. It looks like you guys have ample money coming into the system, and the additional writing of tickets is going to provide even more money for the victims of crime fund. I'm just seeing whether you guys have made any changes in that regard or what you're going to do with this money. I know that currently, too, there's a \$100,000 cap on what people can receive under this fund. Given the large surplus is there any consideration given to expanding that cap or extending it to \$150,000? I'll just leave those questions, and we'll keep going.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, and thank you for those questions. In regard to the \$42 million surplus in the victims of crime fund this year that fund is in a surplus position as a result of an increase in fine revenue. Fifteen per cent of the revenue that we generate in the province from fines goes into that fund, so that's where that money comes from.

Fine revenue has been increasing over the last few years at a greater rate than what goes out the other end even though program spending has increased. This year we're increasing that spending by \$7.5 million. For example, you spoke about groups receiving grants. We've increased those grants from \$100,000 to victims' services groups to \$150,000 per group. In the cities of Edmonton and Calgary I believe their limit was \$150,000 per group last year. That's now gone up to \$300,000. So we do appreciate the work that these volunteer groups do for us, and we have increased the amount of money available to them to ensure that they can continue providing the great service they do.

In regard to the victims of crime cap at \$110,000 that's the maximum amount that can be paid out under that program, and at this point in time we're not planning on increasing that cap. That budget has also gone up because of the increases in incidents where people are applying for that money.

Mr. Hehr: These surpluses – I think you answered that – are not being returned to general revenues; they're just staying in the fund. Correct?

If we could also look at strategy 6.4. That's on page 260. It states that the department will "in consultation with key stakeholders, develop new programs for victims of crime, such as the provision for counselling services." Who are these stakeholders, and is the APBVSA included amongst this group of stakeholders? Do you have any idea of how much of the \$41 million surplus will go towards the development of these programs? Again, I think you explained it there, but even I in my brief time have heard from victims' services groups who are looking for increased funding. You've sort of budgeted already what those increases will be this year. What is your estimated surplus going to be, then, at the end of this year? Will it be \$41 million? Will it be \$44 million? Will we see some of this money out in the community to reduce that surplus?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'll explain in a little more detail the victims of crime fund surplus. As I indicated, it comes from revenues primarily from federal and provincial surcharges. It's a dedicated fund used to provide victims' programs and services as well as financial benefits for victims of crime. When there is a surplus, these funds are held in a separate account, which does not become a part of the government's general revenue and is protected for use by victims of crime only. So it's a fund. I believe it's prudent to have a surplus there, but is \$42 million the right amount? I think that's a little higher than what we want, and that's why we've increased spending this year. Or one of the reasons why we're able to.

3:40

In this year's budget there has also been a significant increase in the funding for the victims of crime financial benefit program and victims' program branch, which I've covered off and touched on already. Our department is also implementing an enhanced funding model for grant programs, considering the enhancement of victims' programs and services that will assist in dealing with this growing surplus.

You spoke about counselling services. I believe I spoke to that already as well, but again, it's committed to delivering gaming and liquor in a socially responsible manner and uses evidence-based decision-making to develop information programs that assist Albertans in being responsible. Again, that kind of covers off what that is about.

The funding that goes to them. In '08-09 in the ministry we have budgeted a total of \$13.6 million to assist victims of crime through a variety of programs going back to the surplus. What will that surplus be at the end of the year? We're looking at it probably not going to change very much. It's going to be close to where it's at, but again we're going to evaluate the additional expenditures that we were making this year, and hopefully it'll start coming back down.

Mr. Hehr: If we could just, sort of, turn to police funding formulas. This has been of some concern, I guess, in the cities in particular. The funding formula for our communities over a hundred thousand people is simple. It's \$16 per capita. That sort of means that in Edmonton and Calgary, areas like this, we would at least have a greater perceived need dealing with gang violence, et cetera, that tends to locate itself in the cities and, in particular, in the inner-city communities like Calgary-Buffalo and Edmonton-Centre or maybe the areas of this province that have increased crime. Other areas are going down, but the inner cities are having an increase in crime. We were wondering why this funding has not increased or a different police funding formula for major cities dealing with these sort of things has not arisen.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, an excellent question and, certainly, one that's near and dear to the hearts of Calgarians and Edmontonians. You're accurate in regard to the \$16 per capita, but what's missing in that is \$97 million of fine revenues which is also returned to these policing agencies. I think Calgary's total was around \$42 million last year, so on top of the \$16 per capita they also received about \$42 million returned in fine revenue, and we are one of the only jurisdictions that does that.

We also have a number of joint programs that we finance through ALERT, the Alberta law enforcement response team, such things as

IROC, the integrated response to organized crime, which is made up of members of Calgary, Edmonton, that RCMP, and possibly some other policing jurisdictions within Alberta. Again, we fund that totally through the province, so that's a very effective way of policing. It also adds, of course, to the effectiveness of the Calgary police force, for example, because we know that organized crime moves around the province, and this province-wide team is very able to do that as well. It gives the Calgary police another arm and another tool to fight organized crime, and that's just one example.

The integrated child exploitation team would be another example of that. We also have the CISA team, which, again, actually investigates organized crime activities above and beyond IROC.

There are a number of initiatives like that that we don't get credit for when the mayors of the municipalities talk about the \$16 per capita because it's actually a lot more than that. Also, keep in mind that municipal policing is really the responsibility of the municipality, and although we share a responsibility there, I believe we're living up to our mandate.

On top of that, I would refer to the hundred new police officers that our government through our Premier has committed to. Calgary is getting 41 new police officers that the province will be paying for. So I think that when you put everything together, certainly, I'm not going to apologize for the funding that we have. We believe it's very adequate. That being said, also this year we'll be looking at a whole new policing framework, which will also include funding. We are going to be taking a hard look at that and making sure that it's equitable and fair right across the province.

Mr. Hehr: If you could explain more. Basically, the long and short of that, you're saying that the city of Calgary is getting a \$16 dollar per capita thing plus these extras. You mentioned in particular \$42 million. Do other smaller policing jurisdictions, then, get grants of a similar nature? Does, say, Lloydminster get a grant on top of their per capita funding? Does Fort McMurray get a grant on top of their funding? Does Lethbridge get a grant on top of their funding? If so, what are those three centres' grants comparatively to Calgary's?

Mr. Lindsay: Yeah, it applies through all of the municipal policing agencies across the province, and again it's based on the fine revenue generated by that jurisdiction.

Mr. Hehr: All things being equal, then, all jurisdictions are being funded in an equal manner. I don't think you really answered my question as to why we're not doing more for the Edmonton city centre, Calgary city centre – maybe I've been misled into believing because of my living in the downtown locale that that's where the significant challenges are – and if you see any proposed changes to maybe those core areas that are having more difficulty. Or am I just totally out of the loop that these areas are suffering more disproportionate crime?

Mr. Lindsay: That's an excellent question. Again, realizing that two-thirds or basically two-thirds of the population in the province live in either Edmonton or Calgary, I think that if you looked at the fine revenue that's turned back in to the municipality, it would be very close to that. Although we see more concentrated crime activity in the larger centres, we also know that due to the effective policing in both Edmonton and Calgary, a lot of the criminal activity has now moved out to rural Alberta. We think that the method that we use to distribute that fine revenue is fair, but again we are looking at that picture.

Mr. Hehr: That's a fair response. Really, you've touched on this,

but I'd just like to hear your comments. You know, it's again more on the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge front. The mayors – you've briefly touched on their concerns – and the AUMA have sought \$35 per capita for a core police funding initiative, and that would be for more, I believe, police funding on the streets in the neighbourhood. Correct me if I'm wrong. Is that what that would see, more neighbourhood cops in the area? What are your comments on that number? You don't see that a \$35 an hour raise, say, for those cities would be inequitable, then, compared to other centres? Is that sort of what the position of the department is right now?

3:50

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you. Well, the position of our department right now is that we believe we're funding our policing agencies across the province fairly. We've spoken to the AUMA about their request for \$35. I'm not sure if they've even taken into consideration the \$97 million, which is on top of the \$16 million that we hand out. I also want to point out that . . . [Mr. Lindsay's speaking time expired]

The Chair: Please proceed. We are now in the last 20 minutes of the first hour. Continue on.

Mr. Lindsay: Okay. Another thing I want to point out is that between the hundred officers that we're financing that are hitting the streets this year, 76 of those officers are going to Edmonton and Calgary, so that's a pretty big commitment.

Mr. Hehr: Just sort of going along on your hiring of police officers, targets were 35, 35, and I believe an additional – well, 100 for each large centre and then 100 for the rural areas. What is the hiring of police officers over the course of the next three years? I should have actually had this memorized, but if you could just confirm that with me. How is our hiring going? How are we finding new recruits? My understanding is that it's very challenging right now. We could say that we're going to hire 100 new police officers tomorrow and would have difficulty finding them. What are we doing to, I guess, find new officers, to try to get people to go into this profession?

I know that when I grew up in the '90s, let's face it . . .

Mr. MacDonald: In the '90s?

Mr. Hehr: Well, no. Earlier than that.

You know, when many of my friends were considering police officer as a profession, it was then a university degree and all of that stuff. Now we're having difficult challenges even getting people right out of high school into what was at one time considered a great profession. Whether people have sort of lost that initiative or what, I'm not sure. I'm just wondering what you're doing to encourage people to get into the profession and that sort of stuff.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, just to be clear again on the hundred officers that we're funding through the province, this particular year 41 go to Calgary, 35 to Edmonton, and 24 to municipal police forces outside of Edmonton and Calgary. There are three criteria that they have to qualify for to get that. First of all, they have to be at their full allotment of officers, they have to have the ability to recruit and train them, and they have to present us with a business plan as to how they're going to be utilized. Next year, you know, those numbers could switch around a bit. There were two or three jurisdictions this year that didn't apply because they either didn't

think they were going to be at full allotment or they didn't have the infrastructure in place to support additional officers. But that could change next year. I wouldn't see the overall numbers changing a lot over the next three years, but they will move around a bit.

On top of the hundred officers that we talk about funding, there's also, I believe, about \$3.5 million that we have available for the provincial policing agreement which is out in rural Alberta. That could be up to 40 to 50 additional RCMP officers who will be working in the province by the end of the year who are not included in this hundred.

In regard to recruits, like any other segment in the province the labour market is scarce, but we have, in working with the policing agencies in the province, set aside \$1.2 million as a marketing strategy. The Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police is working together on joint recruiting. In the past couple of years they have had a tendency to take from each other to boost their ranks, so we're getting them out of that mode and working together to develop a strategy. Looking at the numbers now, it appears that the majority of these forces are now up to their full allotment. I don't believe that they will have any problem filling in this hundred that we're talking about now.

Mr. Hehr: I'm just moving on to a question that stems from our movement towards sheriffs and their interaction with the RCMP and police forces. It appears to some people that we're moving more toward an Alberta police force despite the protestations otherwise. Also, I'd just sort of like to hear your comments on how these groups are interacting. What's the reaction of the RCMP to what is basically an encroachment on their traditional turf? What is the role of the RCMP now within Alberta? Are they simply to stay in Claresholm and to drive up and down the street in between the 7-Eleven and, you know, the end of town? I realize that I'm being a little bit facetious here, but if you could sort of highlight how those ministries are going to work.

There's also the issue I learned about this morning. To hire an RCMP officer, what would have been \$160,000 to have one RCMP officer would cost us \$115,000 after we get our 30 per cent cut from the government. My understanding is that to put a sheriff on the road is \$95,000. With the difference there only being \$20,000 – and, in my view, an RCMP officer on the road is able to react more adeptly to murders, gun shootings, whatever the deal, more quickly and more effectively than a sheriff – why has the ministry chosen to go to this class? Are we going to be able to access this money, previously accessed through the feds, that we used to hire our RCMP officers in some other fashion? I know that was a long, rambling question that, hopefully, you can decipher something out of. I think you knew where I was trying to get to on it.

Mr. Lindsay: That was actually a great question, and let me give you a long, rambling answer. First of all, I want to point out that it's not our intention to create a provincial police force in this province. We are in the preliminary stages of renegotiating the contract with the RCMP, along with other jurisdictions across our country. This existing contract expires in 2011, so we've already met with the commissioner, and we're starting to talk about what the next contract should look like.

The sheriffs were not put on our highways as a cost-saving measure. They were put on our highways because of the carnage that's occurring on our highways. Couple that with: is an RCMP officer more valuable fighting crime or sitting on the side of the highway running radar or doing other things? You know, the sheriffs have been in place since September '06, so backing that up to almost before that, when things started kicking off in regard to

that, the RCMP were not at full allotment in our province. They could not get the graduates that we needed to come to our province. When you look at their mandate as to what they do and their priorities, highway safety and highway patrol are not one of their top priorities. One of our top priorities is to ensure that Albertans remain safe, so that in a nutshell is why we put our sheriffs on the road.

Our sheriffs are not policemen; they're peace officers. The RCMP, as you know, have full Criminal Code authority as well as provincial statutes, et cetera. Our sheriffs today have provincial legislation that they enforce, including the highway safety act, the liquor control act, and a number of other provincial jurisdictions. I also want to point out the co-operation that our sheriffs have had with the RCMP. In fact, we've had over 200 joint operations with the RCMP since we've put them on our highways. They work very closely together. They know where each other is at, what they're doing, and a lot of times you'll see them working together.

Again, we know from the feedback that we're getting from Albertans that our sheriffs are doing a great job. They are reducing the speed on our highways. They are ticketing some aggressive driving behaviours that are causing accidents. In fact, to speak to the last May long weekend, I think it's the first long weekend that I'm aware of for years that we did not have a fatality on our highways. I think that speaks for itself.

4:00

Because of the success and because our sheriffs have taken 400 suspected impaired drivers off our highways since they've been there, since September of '06, we are going to be expanding their authority to enforce the Criminal Code in regard to impaired driving and drugs. We have also purchased two mobile breathalyzer units which we'll make available not only to the sheriffs but RCMP and other jurisdictions who want to use them. Again, it's all about making sure that our roads are safe in our province, and I believe these are all steps in the right direction. So I hope that rambling answer answered your question.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you. Thank you very much for those answers. You brought it up, Mr. Solicitor General. I was going to try and be quiet here this afternoon, but you brought up additional powers for seizing drugs, so that triggers my mind to something. Are you guys investigating additional powers to seize vehicles for gun use, possibly putting them up for public auction, that kind of stuff? I believe those measures would be better, not for worse, and take some bite out of crime, like McGruff the Crime Dog used to say. I'll leave that one to you, and then we can sort of move on to another topic. Remember that it was you who triggered my mind. There was no way I was going to ask that redundant question again to you.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, I'm glad that I stimulated some good thoughts in your mind because you raise a very good point. We want to make sure that we do everything that we can, again, to ensure the safety of Albertans.

In regard to seizing illegal weapons, we have some legislation in place now; obviously, the Criminal Code. There's the federal Customs Act and the proceeds of crime act and also our own Traffic Safety Act that give us provision to seize vehicles. Officers can seize vehicles when they believe they are needed for evidence to support an investigation. For example, if they stop the vehicle on highway 2 heading north or south – it's immaterial – with a number of unregistered weapons in it and they felt the need to seize that

vehicle to continue their investigation, they would certainly do that.

Are there are other opportunities that could be in place to increase the number of vehicles that would be seized to reduce the carrying of illegal weapons on vehicles? We'll be looking at that, but again we have to be very cautious how we move on that because you don't want to be seizing vehicles and then have it thrown out of court. Then we have to pay the storage fees, et cetera. So those are things that we look at. You raise a very good point, and we will be considering those things as we move forward, but we do have some effective legislation now so that we can deal with these issues.

Mr. Hehr: I understand your answer, but, you know, it just shouldn't be from my perspective, our perspective. It should be almost a zero tolerance policy: you're driving around with an illegal gun; you're going to get your vehicle seized. If that's available under the provision, I would like to see a direction from you telling police officers: yeah, we're allowed to do that. Okay? I don't see that as happening. That's what the Calgary Police Association sort of indicated they would like to see happen. That's, from my perspective, what I'd like to see.

I'd also like to almost see – and I realize this is more difficult and more trepidatious. We may not be able to go there. You know, should guns that are registered to an individual even be lent out to someone driving in another car, transporting them around? Do you know what I'm saying? Should a gun in a car not belong to the owner of the car? I realize that that may seem a real impediment on people's rights. I don't see it as such. It's your gun. You should be with it in your car. It shouldn't be driving around with someone else. Just to see what your comments are on that front or whether I'm totally on a loony Liberal rant right now.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, let me say that I don't believe this minister has ever indicated to any of our policemen that they shouldn't be enforcing the laws that we have. We believe that they have excellent tools now. Can we make some more tools available to them? Possibly we can, and we look at those things all the time to make sure that we give our policemen the tools that they need to effectively enforce the laws of the land.

In regard to seizing a vehicle, you know, I'll use just one example when I talk about the danger of seizing. For example, if there was a rural person travelling down the highway going between fields to shoot gophers that had a .22 in his vehicle – it could be owned by his son; he might not even be aware it's there, whatever – and he gets pulled over, the RCMP will seize the weapon today. If he were to seize that vehicle and it's in storage for 60 days before it gets before the courts and the judge says: "What are you doing? You've taken away this person's ability to make a living," then all of a sudden we would have to pay the storage fees and give the vehicle back. So there are some dangers there.

In regard to the gun registry, which you alluded to, I don't want to point any fingers, but I believe it was a Liberal government who put in the gun registry, and it is legal today. In fact, I have sons that hunt, and there has been an occasion where they've actually borrowed my registered firearm, and they have a possession certificate. They can legally borrow my firearm and go hunting. That's the way the law is today. I'd be quite upset if they were pulled over and that gun was confiscated, because it is legal. You know, I don't think it's a problem, but I also understand your concern with the illegal use of firearms. I'm sure that we'll do what we can to make sure that we get as many of them off the street as we can.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you for your comments. You know, hey, I'm not after .22s or the pop guns on this. What I'm talking about is some of the handguns and the stuff that's out there for killing people and with no other reason why they're in cars and that kind of stuff. I'm sure your department has shown themselves to be so far eminently smart enough, if they wish to go there, to draft legislation that would accomplish that goal. But I leave that sort of rant where it is, and we'll continue to press on in both our ways to try and make our city streets safer.

Now, if I can just sort of get back on track. We're still on police funding formulas, and if we could talk about communities from 5,001 to 20,000. It provides a base payment of I believe \$200,000 plus an additional \$8 per capita grant. You know, from our perspective it seems like this is maybe not enough to cover the true policing costs in these rural areas. Can the minister tell us what brings that number for police funding for rural communities of between 5,001 and 20,000 into play? Is that adequately serving those communities? Just comment on whether you're having any more calls from those communities for increased policing, like you are from the urban centres, Calgary and Edmonton.

Mr. Lindsay: First of all, in regard to the funding formula, the 5,001. Going back a few years ago, it was 2,500, and for reasons of it putting too large a burden on municipalities with 2,500, it was moved up to 5,001. However, we're now hearing back from municipalities who are just hitting the 5,001 and above that it's a huge hit to their budget, and there's no doubt that it is substantial. Again, as we review the policing framework this summer, we will look at that and make sure that it's fair and equitable to all municipalities.

In regard to requests for policing in rural Alberta, even considering the formulas that we have in place today for funding, we get a lot of requests for additional officers through the enhancement program that we have in place with the RCMP. Certainly, all communities in our province are feeling the need to have more boots on the street to combat criminal activity in the province.

4:10

The Chair: We have 25 seconds.

Mr. Hehr: Then I'll wait. I think I'm on the list again, and I'll get my bearings straight and try and have a little more cohesive set of questions on the next round. I'll get them straight. Now I'll pass it along to the next person on the list.

The Chair: We've just completed the first hour for the Official Opposition. I would now like to recognize the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the minister and his staff as well for providing information and answers this afternoon. I welcome them. They were also present this morning at the Public Accounts Committee, and I had an opportunity to ask a couple of questions at that time.

I guess the place I'd like to start is with policing. I know that the government has included in this budget finances to increase the number of police officers in the province. I think it's a hundred police officers. Mr. Chairman, I recognize the difficulty in recruiting and retaining police officers in the present economic circumstances of the province. Going back to 2004, in the election at that time we called for an increase in funding for police in the province sufficient to add enough officers to bring Alberta up to the national average of police officers per capita, which I believe was about 500

police officers at that time. In the intervening period I think that number has risen to about 800, which would be required to bring Alberta up to the national average. I wonder if the minister could share with us whether or not he believes it's possible and what steps would need to be taken to recruit and train additional police officers above and beyond the 100 – I know that this is an important issue – and what, in his view, the requirements are for the major centres versus smaller centres.

I'd also like the minister maybe to talk a little bit about the government's plans with respect to the Alberta sheriffs. We had some questions about that in Public Accounts this morning, and I was reminded by the minister's staff that the sheriffs are not meant to replace existing police, particularly RCMP, but to provide a supplement. Nevertheless, I think we've seen the growth of a number of centres. Intelligence units and other units have been created which are consistent with the creation of an entire police force. In fact, some members opposite have in the past proposed that we should create a provincial police force, similar to Quebec and Ontario. I also recall that Alberta used to have its own police force, a provincial police force. I'd like to know the minister's views on just how much we want to expand the function of the sheriffs in this province and whether or not at some point the government would consider not renewing the RCMP contract. Maybe the minister can remind me about the terms and duration of the contract for policing with the RCMP and whether or not the government will consider letting that lapse at some point.

There's also been considerable concern, I know, among smaller municipalities who depend on the RCMP for policing about the lack of control that they have over the operations of the police and whether or not they're actually present in a given small community and whether or not the priorities that they've set are consistent with local priorities. I wonder if the minister could maybe enlighten us with respect to representations he may have received about that situation and whether or not the provincial sheriffs are playing any sort of role in that. I know that the sheriffs have assumed considerable responsibility for speed enforcement on our highways, and I wonder if that's shared with the . . .

Mr. MacDonald: Did you get caught?

Mr. Mason: I've had the good fortune to not encounter any of them at this point.

Are they going to take over the enforcement entirely for traffic enforcement on the highways or partially, just where the government sees that ending up?

If the minister could answer some of those questions, Mr. Chairman, I'd be most grateful.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for those good questions. First of all, in regard to the hundred police officers that are going to be entering into service this year across the province and whether or not we're going to be able to supply them, there were three conditions on any municipality to accept their allotment. First of all, there had to be a full allotment on their existing force, they had to have the ability to recruit and train, and they had to present us with a business plan as to how they were going to utilize them. So we're confident that for the 41 going to Calgary, the 35 going to Edmonton, and the 24 going out to other municipalities across the province, at the end of the fiscal year those officers will be there and will be contributing to crime reduction in our communities.

In regard to the number of police officers per capita, we have actually increased the numbers by 600 over the last four years, but of course with the booming population I'm not sure what that's done to the ratio. It's not the effect that we would obviously have liked to have seen. It's 300 over the next three years, and that's only the 300 that are going to, basically, municipal policing. The RCMP: through our provincial policing agreement there will be increases to those as well. In fact, this year we have \$3.2 million, which could amount to probably around 40 extra RCMP going to rural Alberta in this year's budget on top of the hundred. Then municipalities may increase their role as well, their allotment of police officers above the hundred that we're paying for, and I know some of them are doing that.

In regard to recruiting, we do have a \$1.2 million marketing strategy through the Alberta Chiefs of Police so that they jointly develop a strategy to recruit rather than what's happened in the last couple of years, where they tend to recruit from within the ranks of another policing agency. We see that helping as well.

We're still moving forward with the police college, so we hope to have that enter the mix here within the next three to four years, depending on how long it takes to get the approval and get it built. Again, that's going to make a big difference here in policing in the province.

In regard to effective policing, though, it's more than just the number of police officers that are out on the streets. We have an organization called ALERT, which I'm sure the hon. member is aware of, that funds integrated policing units across the province. For example, IROC is one of those: integrated response on organized crime. There are members on that team from both the Edmonton and Calgary RCMP. The DUST teams – the drug undercover street teams – the integrated child exploitation teams, other investigative teams that we have as well: we believe that to be more effective in policing. It's policing agencies working more effectively together, and our IT database strategy, which we're moving forward with and which will give a common database to all policing agencies across the province, is another indication of that. The first responder radio system is another initiative that will make sure that our policing agencies are in closer contact with each other and able to work more effectively.

4:20

In regard to the sheriffs program I want to back up, I guess, to 2005, when the RCMP weren't at full allotment. We saw an increase in accidents on our highways. The RCMP: their number one priority isn't highway patrol; it's crime prevention. We were quite concerned with the number of accidents on the highway, so that's why sheriffs were put on our roads. They are peace officers; they're not police officers. We have no intention whatsoever to form a provincial police force made up of sheriffs. Our provincial police force is the RCMP.

The contract is up with them in 2012. I've already met with the commissioner, and there has been a committee formed that has met with others because it's a nation-wide contract that's negotiated with other jurisdictions. There have already been meetings to start putting together strategies for those negotiations. We anticipate that by 2012 we'll have a new long-term contract with the RCMP, and they will continue to provide the great service they have in this province for the last hundred years.

In regard to the sheriffs we believe they are having an effect on the safety of our highways. If I can just relate to the last long weekend, I believe the fact that we had zero fatalities on our highways on the last long weekend and the fact that our sheriffs and RCMP were on our highways and our sheriffs issued over 2,800 tickets in three days speak to the fact that it is a deterrent. They are

having an effect. The comment we get back from Albertans is: keep up the good work. They are slowing the traffic down. They are encouraging people to get rid of the bad behaviours that they have. So we believe that is a very effective program. We intend on continuing along with that, and in all likelihood we will be expanding that program next year as well. Right now we have, I think, around a hundred sheriffs on our highways, and we have a few more coming on this year. Next year, depending on how the budget goes, there'll hopefully be some more.

With regard to the question on the effectiveness of the RCMP in responding to community concerns. Again, the way the contract is structured, we give them areas we would like them to concentrate on regarding enforcement. However, the deployment of resources to individual detachments is their responsibility. We have a number of community policing committees that have been formed across the province, and we are encouraging both communities and the RCMP to develop those in all the detachments so that the community has a direct relationship with the RCMP or police in their community so they can provide their input and ensure that they get the effective policing that they desire.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that I've answered the first round of questions.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much to the minister for those answers. I'd like to ask a couple of questions now about corrections. You know, it's a fact that almost all people who enter the corrections system, whether the federal or provincial corrections systems, do return at some point to the community. Therefore, the frame of mind or the attitude or the condition of the individual when they return to the community is of utmost interest, I think, to the community. I know that the supervision of individuals within the community is a challenge.

I had the opportunity to go a number of years ago, when I was in municipal government, on a ride-along with people who were involved in the supervision of offenders released into the community, parole officers. I'm just wondering if the minister can tell us what steps are being taken to improve the integration of released offenders into the community to make sure that they're gainfully employed, appropriately supervised, and don't engage in behaviour which is either in contradiction to the terms of their parole or otherwise, you know, antisocial in nature.

In addition, I'd like to ask a little bit about the remand situation. I know that the rising pressures on remand have resulted in using the Fort Saskatchewan jail to house a significant number of people who were remanded in custody prior to the completion of the new facility and that the new facility will house 2,000 offenders. The question, really, is whether or not these continued pressures can be met in the longer term and how we protect the staff that work in these overcrowded situations.

When you have a serious crowding situation, you need to increase the staff to inmate ratio even higher. I'm wondering if the minister can tell us whether or not they're able to do that to the satisfaction of those employees and, I guess, of their union as well and what the pressures are on the provincial corrections. Specifically, if you're using more facilities for remand and there's more apprehension of offenders, then do we have sufficient facilities available for people that are going to be remanded? They're convicted and guests of the province.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, in regard to programs. We try to rehabilitate these folks so that they can contribute to society after serving their time. Given the short time that most offenders are in provincial custody, the focus is on short and continuous intake programs. An increasing percentage of the adult inmate population consists of remanded inmates. Currently 56 per cent of all of those who are in remand are in courses. Many of our offender education programs and adult centres are delivered in co-operation with Alberta advanced education.

Funding for the current year is in the neighbourhood of \$2.7 million. In '07-08 approximately 89 per cent of sentenced offenders were involved in work, education, treatment, or life management programs, so we believe that we are heading in the right direction there with some of the changes to the Criminal Code by the federal government. We believe that some of these people will be kept in longer, and we will then have a better opportunity to provide them with programs so they can get on with their lives in a meaningful way.

It's interesting, you know. The overcrowding in the remand centre and the three-for-ones are definitely a concern because then we don't get them in there long enough to get them the programs that they need. Again, it was encouraging to see a judge the other day actually turn down a three-for-one and get that person back into a facility so that he can get some additional programming and, hopefully, again be able to contribute to society when they get back out.

In regard to monitoring the activity of those after they are released, we are hiring 30 additional probation officers this year to keep a better handle on those who are on probation and also reduce the workload of those probation officers we have right now.

4:30

As you mentioned, the new remand centre is under construction and hopefully will be completed late 2011. You also mentioned Fort Saskatchewan basically being a remand centre now, I think, except for one block which houses sentenced inmates. We are renting space off the federal government in Grande Cache and other locations to make up the difference. So we're not at a point yet where we're turning anybody away. Also, in regard to the remand centre and the overcrowding there, in the last year we have added an additional 60 police, corrections officers.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have some questions for the minister regarding enforcement and particularly with respect to the matter of speed. I want to start by talking about that, and I want to commend the minister for the number of initiatives that he's taken to reduce speeding in the province, including the sheriffs' increased prominence on provincial highways.

I want to start by saying that speeding is one of the major causes, if not the major cause, of motor vehicle accidents in the province. On an average day in Alberta there are 80 motor vehicle accident injuries. More than one person will be killed and about 400 vehicles damaged each and every day, on average. This produces a toll which is not only economic in nature, not only reflected in lost productivity; it also provides an increased burden upon the health care system and on our support systems to help those people to recover and to be back into a productive mode in society.

There are a number of studies that have been done with respect to the effects of speed, and I won't go into them. But the real cost is beyond the economic cost; it's the human and emotional cost that serious injuries and death have upon Alberta families. I want to note

that speed is a contributor because of the fact of basic physics: energy equals the mass of a vehicle times the speed squared. Stopping distance is increased. Reaction times are more critical at higher speeds. I think that everything that the government is doing with respect to increasing speed enforcement is a very positive step in the right direction.

What I would like to ask the minister, though, with respect to the issue of speed enforcement is with respect to the emerging, new technologies that are coming out. I know that the predecessor minister in this portfolio had received consent and approval for expanding the use of photoradar on Alberta highways. I think that there are emerging technologies which would allow those things to be much more widely used with a minimal increase in personnel.

There are also possibilities of using expanded technology, where there are remote measurement and digital processing of images which could be relayed to policemen down the road. I think there are additional opportunities that might be utilized, the advantage there being that one can positively identify those that are committing the infractions, whereas a strictly mechanical device where the citations are mailed out would only allow one to penalize the registered owner of the vehicle and not really get the culprit who got behind the wheel. So I would ask him whether or not the department is using any of these technologies, has any plans to use these remote sensing technologies and digital imaging in order to catch up to individuals and make sure that they get the demerits that they so rightly deserve.

I wonder, also, if the minister could advise whether or not there are any opportunities to use remote measurements in, perhaps, camouflaged boxes along the highways of Alberta. If they were every two or three miles down the road, one would never know when one of them was a real device and when it was a dummy. Some other opportunities I know have been tried in a number of the U.S. states in terms of keeping people on their toes and observant of the regulations.

I'll start with those issues with respect to speed and ask the minister if he could respond.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member raises some very valid points. You know, the stats regarding accidents on our highways. They are, indeed, devastating to families and also a huge, huge cost to the health care system in the province. It's more than just speed; it's changing lanes, tailgating, et cetera, et cetera.

The hon. member talked about mass and the time it takes to bring that to a stop. It seems to me that most people, when they're driving down the highway in a vehicle that could weigh 3,000 to 5,000 pounds, don't realize the fact that that vehicle stops in an instant but they don't, and that's what causes the severity of the injuries that we see.

Obviously, we have looked at photoradar on our highways, and we will work with the office of traffic safety to explore new enforcement opportunities. There's always the question as to whether it's a deterrent or whether it's a cash cow, but I'm convinced that photoradar is a deterrent. From what I've seen in my community, it certainly is a deterrent to speeding. We will continue to look at that. I've also spoken to the RCMP regarding photoradar on our highways, and they've certainly given it some thought as well.

The hon. member spoke about some of the things that he's seen south of the 49th parallel. One of the things that I've seen down there are unmanned police cars sitting in ditches, which give the impression that they could be running radar there. We're also

looking at that, whatever it takes to slow Albertans down and encourage safe driving practices. We will do whatever we can to encourage that.

I thank the hon. member for his questions.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Minister. The next question I have is with respect to the enforcement of speed and the speed tolerances. There seems to be a public perception, if not a real fact, that law enforcement officials are reluctant to enforce the speed within a certain limit. For example, in a 110 speed limit zone on the Queen Elizabeth II highway it's often said that there won't be any tickets handed out unless you get to 122, or 12 kilometres per hour over the speed limit.

I've done some very preliminary calculations of what that would entail in terms of the stopping distances and the energy involved, and that's quite a significant increase. The 12 kilometres that would be within that tolerance would be somewhere close to a 25 per cent increase in the energy and, therefore, a great increase in the stopping distance and a decrease in the available reaction times for drivers to take evasive action in the event they had an untoward tire blowout or a side-swipe from a vehicle or slipping on the ice or whatever.

I wonder if the minister would comment, given the fact that technology is getting much more refined, whether we really need to have a 10 per cent plus or minus tolerance to enforce the speed laws. If we do and if the speed limit is really 122 kilometres on the Queen Elizabeth II, would he consider lowering the speed limit to 100 so that it would be down to 112 in reality?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

4:40

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you. First of all, regarding the assumption that you might be safe if you stay within 20 kilometres of the posted speed limits. The posted speed limits in our province are maximum speeds that are based on the design of the highways. The tolerance is at the discretion of the police, and it's an operational issue. If it's heavy traffic and they start ticketing everybody who's going, for example, five kilometres over the limit, it could create a traffic hazard. So they monitor that.

Again, we certainly have the technology right down to, I think, probably a tenth of a kilometre an hour. So it's not a matter of technology. It's a matter of patrolling the highways in a safe and efficient manner and protecting the safety of all highway users, encouraging people to follow the rules of the road. Again, the posted speeds are the maximum speeds, not the minimum, not that you travel 10 kilometres faster on a sunny day. I believe that Albertans are getting that message based on the results of the last long weekend.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you, Minister, for those answers. I have another question regarding the commercial transportation vehicles that travel in the province of Alberta. I have travelled on buses, and I know that in other jurisdictions in the world commercial transportation vehicles have governors on them which limit the speed at which they can be driven. They also have seat belts as a mandatory part of their safety equipment in many commercial transportation enterprises throughout the world. I think those would both be positive steps to improve public safety in the province of Alberta.

I want to specifically draw the minister's attention to the fact that commercial buses that are operating within the province of Alberta do use this informal speed tolerance that I referred to earlier, and it is in fact built into their commercial transport schedules. I can prove that to you. If you want to go online and look at the schedules for

the bus companies in the province of Alberta, you'll find that there's no way that they could possibly make those schedules if they were not building speeding into their regimen. Anybody that's driven up and down the Queen Elizabeth II highway knows that the buses do not travel at the speed limit. I would like the minister's comments on that with respect to those safety issues and with respect to the strict enforcement of the speed limits when it comes to commercial transports.

I also want to point out that we're not talking about those commercial transports just driving up and down the highways when the highways are dry and bare but when the visibility is limited, when it is wet, and so on. There is a pressure upon those drivers to meet the schedules of those commercial carriers. It's most unfair to the drivers, and I think it's unfair to the safety of the travelling public as well.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. Some of the issues that the hon. member raises should be directed to the Minister of Transportation, who sets the regulations regarding commercial vehicles. However, that being said, it's beyond me why any transportation company would schedule their times such that they would have to encourage their drivers to disobey the speed limits of our province. That's very risky behaviour.

In regard to the comment about driving on roads that could be snowy or icy or rainy, again I want to point out that the posted speeds are the maximum speeds, and conditions prevail. Anybody from a commercial driver down to somebody driving a passenger vehicle can be ticketed if they're driving at an unreasonable rate of speed taking the road conditions into effect.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions for the hon. minister. Firstly, I would like some more details, please. Earlier you indicated that in the year 2012 the contractual agreement with the RCMP ends. The cost of this police service agreement for 2006-07 was estimated at \$143 million; for 2006 it was \$135 million. Under the terms of the agreement Alberta may terminate the agreement with a two-year notice served on March 31 of any year. Now, can the hon. minister assure us in the province that there is no way we're going to terminate our agreement with the RCMP and expand even further the sheriffs' police service?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has done his homework in regard to reviewing the policing agreement. We have no intention of terminating the agreement with the RCMP. They have a proud history in our province, as I mentioned earlier today. Again, we anticipate that we will have a successful negotiation process and that by 2012 or earlier than that we will have a new agreement in place in conjunction with other jurisdictions in Canada who utilize the RCMP for their provincial policing. That being said, it's a negotiation, and we're very optimistic that we're going to be able to negotiate a very successful agreement. I want to point out also to the hon. member that this year's budget is \$164 million for the RCMP, so if there was a dip there I think in '07, that was because of the inability of the RCMP to provide the officers that we required.

In regard to the sheriffs certainly I'm not going to make any promises that we're not going to expand the program because it is our intention to expand that program in regard to patrolling our

highways, ensuring that Albertans can travel down those highways in a safe manner. So we're going to continue to monitor the success of the sheriffs' program in regard to highway patrol. I want to point out to the hon. member that our sheriffs are peace officers; they're not police officers.

Again, the RCMP are the provincial police force in this province. It's my mandate to negotiate a contract with them, and I look forward to renewing this agreement so that they're here for many more years to come.

Mr. MacDonald: I appreciate that from the hon. minister, and I wish him and his department officials well in their negotiations with the RCMP. Certainly, I see no reason why we would not have the RCMP as our major police force, and I don't see why at this point we would need to expand the sheriffs into an Alberta provincial police.

Now, if I understood the hon. minister's numbers correctly, in the last two years we have expanded the RCMP's budget by \$28 million, and looking at the budget documents before us this afternoon, Mr. Chairman, it looks like in the last two years the sheriffs' department has received a \$77 million increase in their budget. Can the minister please tell me and the taxpayers of this province: how much money on a per officer basis does it cost us for the RCMP? How much money per officer does it cost us for the sheriffs?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you again, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and I are obviously in agreement regarding the effectiveness and the tradition of the RCMP in our province.

In regard to the sheriffs' program and the increase in that budget, the sheriffs also provide court security and prisoner transport in the province. As the hon. member knows, court security has been an issue in our province for a number of years, and we have increased the security in our courts today to make them a lot safer for those who are there and for the judges. In fact, since we've increased the security, over 10,000 weapons have been seized that without that security would have come into the courtroom. So that's the major expansion of the sheriffs' program.

4:50

I also spoke earlier about ALERT, the Alberta law enforcement response team, and the special units that we put in place there: the warrant apprehension teams, the investigative teams in our correction facilities. SCAN is another unit that's going to be soon patrolling our communities. Again, these are specialty units of sheriffs who work in co-operation and integration with the policing agencies, work very effectively, and do a great job in ensuring that we stay on top of the criminal activity in this province.

In regard to salaries. The highway sheriffs were not put on our roads as a cost-saving measure. They were put on our roads to ensure the safety of Albertans. The costs of a sheriff versus the costs of an RCMP, when you consider the 30 per cent that the federal government contributes to the RCMP salary, are actually fairly close.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I have a couple more questions for the hon. minister regarding police personnel in municipal police services. Police officers per 100,000 population: in Calgary it's 159 officers; in Edmonton it's 184. Can the hon. minister tell us why

there are 25 less officers needed in Calgary per 100,000 population?

When we look at communities that have a population of between 5,000 and 15,000, there is a wide range of police officers if we use the per 100,000 population criteria. For instance, in Cold Lake and Devon it would be 77 officers per 100,000 if that was the formula. In Beaumont it would be 69. But in Drayton Valley we would be looking at 161 police officers per 100,000 population. In Slave Lake it would be 179. In Stony Plain, of all places, it would be 208. There seems to be a real representation out there, and I'm curious why there's such a range of police officers per 100,000 population in those communities. What's the formula that determines how many officers would be sited in each one of those respective communities?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. First of all, the formula. The hon. member talked about Edmonton and Calgary. I remind the hon. member that policing in municipalities is the responsibility of the municipalities, so you would have to ask the Police Commission of Edmonton and Calgary as to why they have differing numbers. The same in regard to the other communities who have chosen to police either on their own or utilize the services of the RCMP. Again, it's based on whatever they believe they need to police their communities. A lot of it is based on criminal activity, budgets, et cetera. Certainly, it's not a provincial formula. It's a formula that's put together by each municipality.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. If we could please now go to page 360 of the budget estimates. The element vote for public security, the entire element 2: the actual for 2006-07 listed here is \$255 million. That's for program support and policing programs and the sheriffs' branch. That's the actual expense. But in the annual report from the department for the year 2006-07 there is an indication that there was \$259.5 million spent. Why is there a difference of almost \$4 million in total between what is reported in the annual report and what you are reporting in the budget estimates for that year under the actual amount for 2006-07?

Mr. Lindsay: I'm not exactly sure why that discrepancy shows up, Mr. Chairman, so I'll get a written response to the hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. I'd appreciate that because other amounts in the annual report and what is reported in the budget estimates match, for instance correction services. However, for ministry support services there is a difference there as well of \$3 million. If I could have that addressed as well, I would really appreciate it.

Now, for information technology between 2006-07 and 2008-09 we are seeing an increase of \$3.3 million. This is line 1.0.5 on page 360. Can the minister explain why that budget increase is necessary?

Thank you.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, the reason for the increase in the budget is because we're developing a new IT strategy, so as that moves forward, of course, more money is invested in developing the strategy to move forward with that initiative.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the hon. minister. Corporate internal audits seem to be a standard procedure in each department. I cannot find in here – and I missed it somewhere – the amount that you're going to spend in this year on a corporate internal audit. You spent in the past year, I think, 130 grand. I'm assuming that you spent that checking out the victims of crime fund. How much do you anticipate spending this year for an internal audit?

Mr. Lindsay: We anticipate a similar amount this year, but again it depends on how much the internal audit department requires to go through our budgets to ensure that we're doing the great work that we believe we're doing, including the surplus the hon. member spoke of and the victims of crime fund.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, on page 366 – and we're dealing with the lottery fund estimates here – Culture and Community Spirit. I realize this money is going to each respective department listed here, but we are also looking in these estimates at spending close to \$1.5 billion in lottery fund payments to other ministries, so I fully expect the hon. minister to be able to answer these questions. Now, the major community facilities program isn't going to come to an end in January of 2009, is it?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, Mr. Chairman, that should really be a question to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. That program is under his ministry. We just generate the funds over at my ministry, and they're handed over to other ministries to utilize.

Mr. MacDonald: So if I am to understand this, you are allocating the cash to each respective ministry that's listed here, but you have no say in determining which programs are to be changed or whether they're to receive an increase in funding or a decrease in funding?

5:00

Mr. Lindsay: Well, first of all, Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to stand up here and admit that I have no say in what goes on in our government because we all have our input, all 72 of us members. That being said, each minister puts in their request for the available funds, and we make the appropriate decisions. When those decisions are made, that money stays within that ministry, and the length of their programs and whether they continue them or extend them past the original mandate is, again, up to that particular minister.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again to the same hon. minister: are those decisions to allocate these funds made by officials from the Solicitor General and Public Security department, or are they made by the Treasury Board?

Mr. Lindsay: The decisions are made by the Treasury Board initially.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That would also apply to the community facilities enhancement program, the community initiatives program, and item 26, other initiatives, which is a \$7.9 million amount?

Mr. Lindsay: That would be correct.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Now, I have some additional questions in regard to Alberta gaming or video lottery terminals. We talked a little while ago about police officers per capita. Could the hon. minister please tell me how many VLTs and how many slot machines there are per capita in Edmonton and how many VLTs and how many slot machines there are per capita in Calgary?

Mr. Lindsay: I don't have that information at my fingertips, Mr. Chairman, but I can tell the hon. member that in regard to VLTs that number has been at 6,000 for a number of years, and we have not increased it for at least the last five years. In fact, the places where VLTs are available to play: that number of venues has actually been reduced over the last few years.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. If the hon. minister could provide that information, I would be very grateful. I was looking at some of the numbers in the commission's annual report, and it seemed to me that there were more of these machines in Edmonton than there were in Calgary. Now, I could be wrong.

My next question would be regarding security around the casinos. I asked the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, and he didn't know because he doesn't go to the casinos. I don't go either. You'll have to excuse me if I'm a little bit of a tinhorn here. What amount of money or cash in my pocket can I enter a casino with before I'm identified as a potential fellow with a wad of cash that may have been acquired as a result of an illegal or criminal activity?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There's really no limit as to the amount of money you can walk into a casino with, but the maximum amount you can put into any machine is \$1,000.

Mr. MacDonald: So the maximum amount that I can play is \$1,000 at one time. If I'm at a table and I keep losing and I keep pulling more money out of my pocket and I buy more chips or I make more bets, there's no one looking at me? [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

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

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you very much. I'll just sort of keep on going. I'm just back on sheriffs, doing a few cleanup questions there. We'll see where it goes from there. It says in goal 1, page 255 of the business plan, "Leadership for effective and innovative law enforcement," and strategy 1.6 is as follows: "Supplement policing activities with Sheriffs performing duties such as traffic safety, investigative support, special investigation and warrant apprehension." What is the exact nature of the investigative support that the sheriffs are going to provide?

Mr. Lindsay: In regard to investigative support through the integrated response to organized crime or through working with policing agencies, they do undercover investigations regarding activities of organized crime.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Just a question or two. My understanding is that many of the sheriffs are former police officers. Do you have roughly how many of those sheriffs are former police officers? Would you have that number?

Mr. Lindsay: No, I don't have those numbers here, but I can assure the hon. member that those who are conducting the investigations and the duties that they perform are adequately trained. Regardless of what training they come into the sheriffs' branch with, before they get into any of the operations, whether it's enforcing the highway safety act or doing this investigative undercover work, they are trained appropriately before they would enter into that realm.

Mr. Hehr: I asked this question before; I don't know if I got an answer. Maybe I did, maybe I forgot it, maybe I didn't find it satisfactory, or it could be all three of those. I'm just wondering about the money that we used to get from the feds. I'm assuming that beforehand we hired more RCMP officers to do what the sheriffs did. Have we found any other way to tie into that money from the feds? If that money is just lost, again, at only a \$20,000 expense after we allocate those federal dollars – you know, the difference between the \$160,000 goes down to \$115,000 with allocating federal funds, and with the cost of a sheriff being \$95,000 to outfit them for a year, are we not better served, then, with the RCMP officers? It's a two-pronged question. Are we able to tie into those monies we're leaving on the table through the federal RCMP program to support our sheriffs initiative? Secondly, just back to that other question.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, first of all, I want to reassure the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo that the RCMP are not replaced, but they're augmented by our sheriffs. We have not reduced our contingent of RCMP in our province because we have sheriffs on the road. They're in conjunction with that, and they make the RCMP just that much more effective and allow them to spend more time fighting crime rather than patrolling our highways.

In regard to the comments on leaving money on the table, there's no money left on the table because we haven't changed our allotment of RCMP.

Mr. Hehr: Possibly because I don't understand the agreement with RCMP officers, if we are getting the RCMPs through the federal cost-sharing program, would we be able to hire almost an unlimited number of RCMPs? Are we limited to how many we are allowed to hire a year, if you sort of know what I'm getting at? If it's deemed that Alberta needs 65 new RCMP officers this year, would we be able to get those 65 officers through the federal program and have them match that money if we deem that necessary here?

5:10

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There would be two things that would restrict. Number one is the federal budget. On any requests we make to them for additional RCMP officers, they have to weigh that with their federal budget as to how it applies across our fine country. Again, in the past at times they have not been able to supply the number of RCMP officers that we've requested, so it's not that they have an unlimited supply. They graduate them all through their facility in Regina, and we get our fair share, and depending on budgets and availability, et cetera, those are the two qualifiers that decide whether we get the number that we ask for or not.

Mr. Hehr: Just a follow-up. I know you guys wouldn't have it, but you guys can get it to me at some point. Can I get the requests for the five previous years that you made to the federal government for RCMP officers that were not filled? Could I ask for that number that weren't filled out of all the RCMP officers you asked for?

Mr. Lindsay: Yeah. We have that information available, so we'll get it to the hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you very much.

I'll just rattle off a few questions here, so you don't have to pop up and down. Sorry about that, hon. Solicitor General. What will the exact role of the 14 additional sheriffs tasked with implementing the safer communities and neighbourhoods program be? What percentage of allocation for investigative services will go toward using sheriffs for implementing the safer communities and neighbourhoods program?

Mr. Lindsay: We anticipate having two SCAN units up and running by this fall: two units, one in southern Alberta, one in northern Alberta, seven sheriffs on each unit, again, working undercover. The budget for this year is \$2.9 million.

Mr. Hehr: Sir, if we just move on to private security guards, that continue to sort of have a role within Alberta. I know that when I was door-knocking, actually, in the recent election, many of these private security guards appeared to be armed, wearing flak jackets, and not allowing me to door-knock in that building. But that's neither here nor there, that last point.

I'm just asking, with the advent of security guards, whether he believes there are significant measures in place to keep these guys or these women sort of in line with what the practices and the roles and obligations are to, I guess, providing some sort of security. I see this as being one of those slippery slopes that can get out of control pretty quickly. In fact, at the one building, really, they seemed armed to the teeth with flak jackets. For what it was worth, that's just an anecdotal thing, but to just hear your comments in that regard and what your department is doing to make sure that that situation is monitored.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you. We have the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act. That's in place now. It's been in place for 40 years. That being said, these people do provide a valuable service in regard to law enforcement in our province. We've recently introduced Bill 10 to the Legislature, which is going to bring that into the 21st century in regard to what conditions and what training, et cetera, and how we monitor their activities. Again, there's a bill that has already received first reading and is moving forward. It's updating old legislation that needed to be updated.

Mr. Hehr: Moving on to the ASIRT team, the Alberta serious incident response team. It investigates complaints against police officers regarding serious or sensitive matters. Just moving on to their core business, it outlines: leadership for effective and innovative law enforcement. That was at 1.1: provide civilian oversight. At present most Canadian jurisdictions, B.C. and Alberta excepted, utilize independent review boards to address police misconduct and civilian complaints. Can the Solicitor General advise whether or not strategy 1.1 means that his department will develop an independent civilian body to conduct police oversight for municipal forces – from our perspective it looks as if this is the move and model used by other jurisdictions – or whether he's had any conversations with these other jurisdictions as to whether this format is working for them? If it is, why aren't we using it here in Alberta if it is better? I'd just hear your thoughts on that.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Complaints on police officers and how they're resolved is an interesting topic for discussion. Again, providing civilian oversight for all policing and law enforcement activities across Alberta through the administration, review, refinement of provincial legislation, policies, and standards is something that's near and dear to our hearts. To enhance public confidence in police, a police oversight body, named the Law Enforcement Review Board, has been put in place. We've recently expanded that body as well to ensure that they can reduce the backlogs and ensure that justice is served when a complaint comes forward. Just to back up a step, for complaints against police officers the first step, of course, goes to the chief of police or to the police commission. Depending on their results, either party can take it to the Law Enforcement Review Board. That, we believe, is working quite effectively, and it is made up of members from the public.

Audits of all Alberta police services are regularly conducted to ensure they meet our policing standards. We have groups that actually go to each individual policing agency and do audits on how they handle things such as complaints. New positions are dedicated to civilian oversight. In our ministry is a manager of civilian oversight of policing and a provincial public complaints director. These positions will develop standards, model policies for commissions and committees, and assist our director of law enforcement in monitoring the police handling of complaints. We're getting things in place so that we have a better and more efficient handle on that.

The Alberta serious incidents response team, ASIRT, is a provincial investigative body that can investigate serious and sensitive incidents involving police officers. Again, that body is independent and started operations here this spring. Because of the nature of some of the incidents that they review, they also need to have a background in policing. A lot of these cases will go before the courts, so the investigations have to be carried out under the proper procedures. Our ministry is currently developing a new model for police complaint and disciplinary processes that will encourage police professionalism. It's going to simplify the process and enhance public confidence in the system at the same time. This will involve some legislative changes as well as training for police oversight bodies, so we will be bringing something forward on that in the near future.

Mr. Hehr: Just basically a few final questions on correction issues and, you know, on rehabilitative services and programs available to offenders. It's my understanding that there's an increased spread of hepatitis B and hepatitis C in our prisons, and I was wondering whether it's his ministry or whether in conjunction, probably, with Health you're working on a plan or some way to try and reduce these occurrences.

5:20

Also, on the same topic, there's been much written about services, or lack thereof, available for mental health. I'm assuming that many of the people who are incarcerated are currently having mental health difficulties. I'm just wondering what plans have been laid to help that population, how much money these initiatives will receive in supporting this community inside the jail population, and whether we're trying to get them more supports in the community when they leave, et cetera, et cetera, all of that stuff.

I understand – and I could be wrong on this – that Alberta jails have currently a zero drugs tolerance. Our understanding or what we hear is that there is still significant drug use in prisons. Whether it's conceivable to stop all this or whether some of the things to reduce some of the hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and even worse diseases that are

occurring there may be more prone to a needle exchange program – I've no idea whether this would work or be tolerated in jails or anything like that. It's just a question.

Can the Solicitor General advise what percentage of aboriginal Canadians are incarcerated in the province relative to other minority groups? You know, we realize there are tremendous challenges in that community as well as you do. Do you have any programs or initiatives to support that community when they're coming out of jail – I know you mentioned the pilot project in Hobbema – or any other initiatives that are going on with our native community? That would be great.

Recently we've heard of salary issues raised by corrections personnel who are employed by the corrections office, and they haven't received salary reclassifications for those employed as corrections officers. Now, I asked this in question period, but I was just wondering if there has been any more clarification on that or if you really believe that the pay gradients are just going according to the scale and that it might have been a one-off anomaly that we might have heard about.

Those are my questions. I know I've got two minutes left. If you can get to some of those. Otherwise, if you can give us some form of writing, that would be great.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you. First of all, in regard to the health issues of our inmates, it is generally poor. I'm not sure what the per cent is, but there's certainly a prevalence of infectious diseases, as you mentioned, such as hepatitis B and C, HIV. Mental illness and addictions are far greater, obviously, in our facilities than in the rest of the population at large.

We do assess inmate health. We do provide them with treatment, and we ensure that we have an integrated and collaborative approach in providing continuity of care in the corrections centres and in the community upon release. When they leave our facilities, if they're under care, we ensure there's something in place so that that care continues on.

We also are working in collaboration with Alberta Health and Wellness, AADAC, the Alberta Mental Health Board as well as the Capital health authority and the Calgary health region to explore the feasibility of transferring the provision of correctional health services from our ministry to the health region. Right now we contract those jobs out, and we believe it would be probably more efficient and better integrated if it was through Alberta Health and Wellness.

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

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My questions are around the private security firms. There are about 6,000 security guards and about 150 companies. They are providing a very valuable service in protection of property, customer services to clients, and they are being a deterrent to crime and even intervening in crimes to save lives and property. You know, this is inherently a dangerous job, but there are very few requirements before individuals are granted a

private security licence. They don't have to undergo much training – the employer provides their training – in areas such as self-defence tactics, tactical communication, nonverbal, crisis intervention. In fact, in most cases they are given a radio and a set of keys and sent out on patrol. I know; I did that job. I was just given the uniform, and I was told: "This is the location you go to. Go do that job there." That was a long time ago, back in probably 1972-73, and it's still the same. You know, this is a very dangerous kind of job, and I think they should be provided the proper training on this.

Can the minister tell us if he's initiating any policies to address the safety issues faced by the private security guards, and are there any plans by the minister to provide more training for security guards or ensure that the companies provide adequate training before these individuals assume their duties?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you again, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall raises some interesting points. There is no doubt that security guards, private investigators in our province provide a very valuable service. As I indicated earlier, we certainly also have concerns around the training and the backgrounds of these individuals. The existing legislation is over 40 years old. We have completed a very extensive community consultation and stakeholder consultation in regard to this industry. That's why we have before us in the House today Bill 10. I look forward to the hon. members opposite supporting this bill as it moves through the House because it is going to make a big difference to this very valuable industry in our province.

Mr. Kang: I'd go even a step further. The private security guards need more training in tactics because they do not carry any weapons such as batons or pepper spray, in some cases not even Maglites; you know, those large flashlights. Has the minister considered mandating police training personnel to work with the private security guards or providing additional training through the Alberta Justice college?

Mr. Lindsay: Well, in regard to the weapons that security guards, private investigators require to carry out their duties, again, that will all be covered under Bill 10. In regard to training, again, we'll be looking at private firms to offer that training based on a curriculum that we will develop. At this point in time we certainly wouldn't entertain training them at our Solicitor General's college. We're already at maximum capacity at that particular facility. But if our police college moves ahead, then we would certainly look at it at that particular time.

The Chair: I hate to interrupt the hon. members and the minister, but the time allotted for consideration of the department's estimates has expired. I would now like to invite the officials to leave the Assembly.

The timing is so perfect. It's also 5:30. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) the Committee of Supply is now in recess until 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

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