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The 27th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 2, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the hon. Fidel Herrera Beltrán, governor of the state of Veracruz, Mexico. The governor is joined by Roberto Badillo Ramos, head of the Veracruz commercial office in Montreal; Angel Cortez, director of vocational education; Felipe Ruiz, businessman; Captain Fernandez Cevallos, businessman; Enrique Morales, businessman; and from my ministry Mr. David Nygaard, managing director of the Alberta Mexico office.

Mr. Speaker, the governor has had a long and distinguished career as a public official in addition to serving as the governor of the state of Veracruz. Mr. Herrera Beltrán has also held office as a deputy and as a senator for many state Legislatures. I had the honour of hosting the governor at a luncheon earlier today to welcome him to Alberta. The governor's visit provided an opportunity to discuss areas of future co-operation and collaboration between Veracruz and Alberta. As you are probably aware, as a result of NAFTA Mexico has now become the fourth-largest trading partner of Alberta. I can tell you that as a result of our luncheon today I am absolutely satisfied that Alberta's relationship with the state of Veracruz will grow. If the luncheon today is any indication, I'm thinking that Mexico is headed towards number 3 on that list.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that our honoured guests, who are in your gallery, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of 33 grade 12 students from Magrath, Alberta. These students left home at 6 o'clock this morning, took about a six-hour bus ride on some tough roads. They're with us today. They're going to drive back tonight and arrive home about midnight. This is a dedicated group of students. They're accompanied today by their vice-principal, Darryl Christensen, and their teacher, Gregg Hansen. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would invite them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 15 hard-working staff members from the lands division of Sustainable Resource Development. These are the people that help monitor our grazing leases across central and southern Alberta. These staff are joining us today as part of a public service orientation tour. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Ouellette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of talented interns from Alberta Transportation working in the offices of Transportation safety services and Transportation civil engineering. The internship program provides valuable work experience for recent graduates and first-hand knowledge about a career in public service. These bright individuals are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to stand as I call their names: Lyndsay Karges, Walter Espinoza, Stephen Legaree, Chris Yanitski, Alan Thomas, Jeff Zhang, Chizoba Imoka. Please join me in giving them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As always, it's a great privilege to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly several members of the Elder Advocates of Alberta Society and the association of seniors helping seniors. They are seated in the public gallery and are here today because they are deeply concerned about Bill 24, the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act. Our guests today are June Hunt, Al Owen, Bill Pelech, Mary Pelech, David Doull, Ruth Maria Adria, Irene Stein, Darrell Clarkson, Susan Milner, and Lise Storgaard. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly a group of 10 stellar representatives of the very finest police officers in Edmonton. Among this group are three officers who have just been awarded the Canadian Police Association's award of excellence, a prestigious national award that recognizes police personnel for acts and deeds that far exceed their call of duty. I would ask them to rise as I name them: Constable Dan Furman, Constable Jason Mitchell, and Constable Terry Cassells. They are accompanied today by Staff Sergeant Peter Ratcliff, chair of the Edmonton Police Association; Staff Sergeant Dave Spiers, forensic identification services section; Superintendent Ed McFarlane from north division; Inspector Darren Eastcott from north division; Sergeant Randy Topp; Constable Myles Stromner; and Constable Clayton Ford. I would ask them to accept the welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very special friends and, in my view, two very exceptional Albertans, Warren and Jean Urquhart. Warren is a veteran of World War II, having served with the Royal Canadian Navy as a stoker

petty officer. He was stationed on two ships which served as convoy escorts on the St. Lawrence River, a waterway which saw 23 sinkings during the war. An active member of the naval association, Warren is a very popular Remembrance Day speaker with high school students in Edmonton. Jean is now retired from a successful nursing career, which spanned the 1940s and saw very many significant advances in public health care. Mr. and Mrs. Urquhart are the proud parents of two equally accomplished daughters. Daughter Pauline is the general manager of a prominent Alberta video and film company, and their daughter Carol is a justice on the bench of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. I'm very proud to know them both, and I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three guests. The first is Patti Tahrirha. Patty is a resident of St. Albert and is a student in her first year of social work at Grant MacEwan College. She's planning to continue her studies at the University of Calgary in order to obtain a bachelor of social work. Patti is doing her practicum at my constituency office of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Next is Vanessa Schmidt, who has her bachelor of arts degree in sociology and is currently a student in the social work program at Grant MacEwan College. Vanessa is currently acting as a social work practicum student at the Edmonton-Strathcona constituency office. With them is their friend Melissa Zazelenchuk. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

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

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Primrose Igonor. Ms Igonor immigrated to Canada in 2004. She trained as a clinical psychologist in South Africa and is a registered provisional psychologist in Alberta. Her passion for community building has enabled her to work as a public educator in the not-for-profit sector and, more recently, as a student counsellor at a local college in Edmonton. Her work puts her in touch with diverse groups, particularly immigrants and refugees. Primrose is a formal executive member of the Uganda Cultural Association of Alberta, and she has also more recently become involved with the African-Canadian professional network. I would now ask that Primrose rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Family Doctor Week

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about Family Doctor Week, which was celebrated last week. Family Doctor Week acknowledged the outstanding contributions of Canadian family doctors. Family doctors have a significant impact on the health of individuals and the health care system in our province. Each day family physicians diagnose and treat patients and promote health and prevent illness. They collaborate with other health care professionals to make health care decisions for their

patients. Family doctors also advocate for health policy that can improve the general health of the community.

The complexities of modern health care and the demands of serving a growing population are some of the challenges facing today's family doctors. Government, in co-operation with the province's physicians, continues to look for ways to maintain an adequate supply of family physicians to meet the health needs of Albertans. Expanding education seats, providing recruitment and retention incentives, and advancing primary care networks that allow family physicians to practise as part of a multidisciplinary team are some of these solutions.

We know that Albertans share a high level of trust and confidence in their family doctors. The Alberta Health Quality Council 2006 survey found that 93 per cent of Albertans surveyed were satisfied with their family doctor's knowledge and competence. The same survey found that 83 per cent of respondents were satisfied with their family doctor's impact on their life and health. There is no denying the positive value a family doctor has on an individual's health and on the well-being of the population that they serve.

I also wish to highlight the fact that last Friday this government announced that a tentative agreement has been reached between Alberta Health and Wellness, the Alberta Medical Association, and Alberta Health Services for the 2008-2011 fiscal term. This tentative agreement provides for annual increases that will keep compensation for Alberta physicians among the most competitive in Canada.

To mark Family Doctor Week, we salute the thousands of hard-working and dedicated family doctors practising in communities large and small across Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Police Association Awards of Excellence

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After responding to what appeared to be a disturbance call in Edmonton on June 29, 2006, constables Jason Mitchell and Dan Furman received information that a man with a handgun had been seen in the vicinity nearby the home. Constable Terry Cassells was called to the scene, and the three officers decided on a plan of action to gain entry into the house in question.

The main floor occupants indicated that they were uncertain who was downstairs but denied any knowledge of the suspect described by police. Hearing voices coming from the basement, constables Mitchell and Furman headed downstairs to investigate while Constable Cassells remained on the main floor, interviewing the occupants. As Constable Mitchell approached the furnace room, an individual shot him point-blank in the middle of his chest, striking his trauma plate. Additional rounds struck Constable Furman, resulting in life-threatening wounds to his shoulder and his hand.

Thanks to the rapid response of other responding officers, their neutralization of the suspect, the application of trauma first aid techniques by Constable Mitchell, which he learned with Canadian armed forces, and the professional aid provided by Edmonton's EMS, Constable Furman was rushed to hospital, where he underwent emergency surgery, and his life was saved.

The professionalism, courage, and determination of these three officers meant that no innocent lives were lost during this incident. The policing profession often calls on its members to do their best in the most difficult situations. On this occasion, Mr. Speaker, Constable Terry Cassells, Constable Dan Furman, and Constable Jason Mitchell met and greatly exceeded that call of duty.

For their exemplary police work and for their service to our citizens these constables have been awarded the Canadian Police Association's award of excellence. The award of excellence ceremony is a milestone event for the Canadian Police Association, allowing them to recognize police personnel from across Canada for acts and deeds that far exceed everyday calls of duties. Nominated and selected by their peers, recipients are honoured for their outstanding commitment and dedication to the safety and security of all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I, too, on behalf of all Albertans thank them for their deed. They will be further recognized by the Solicitor General.

Thank you.

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

Children in Poverty

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta poverty from cradle to college. When one scratches below the thin veneer of the so-called Alberta advantage, a grim, growing poverty festers. The most recent StatsCan figures reveal that over 77,000 Alberta children are trying to survive below the poverty line. These numbers, without direct, decisive government intervention federally and provincially, are destined to swell as uprooted families from central Canada, fleeing the negative results of the economic downturn, the tsunamis, and the ripple effects of lost manufacturing jobs, are forced to head west seeking refuge, a chance to rebuild their lives, as was previously the case with the first wave of Maritimers displaced by the fishery collapse.

These families are in for a shock when, for example, they find themselves at the wrong end of the existing list of 58,000 Calgary households who are having difficulty paying rent due to the high cost of living fuelled by this government's refusal to consider even temporary rent controls or the regulation of condominium conversions. Front-line children and youth workers are already overburdened by unmanageable caseloads and are underpaid, particularly in the case of contracted agency workers. If the migrating families have a child with a disability or a special need, they are even more vulnerable as they struggle to find either affordable, accessible accommodation or a PDD support worker.

Considering that a quarter of Alberta's current high school grads who have the high marks and can afford Alberta's highly inflated postsecondary tuition can't be accommodated due to seat restrictions, what hope is there for out-of-province or out-of-country students? Postsecondary food banks are no more able to meet the double demand than their urban and rural counterparts.

Having failed to save for the future or diversify our economy beyond our nonrenewable resource dependency, this Tory government has squandered Alberta's prosperity potential for a second time. Don't expect a third chance.

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

Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement Project

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge recent honours that mark yet another chapter in our province's made-in-Alberta success story. The Alberta schools alternative procurement, ASAP, project continues to gain recognition across the country for its unique approach to building new Alberta schools. Last week the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships recognized Alberta's commitment to pursuing excellence and innovation by presenting its merit award for social infrastructure procurement to the ASAP project.

Through this public-private partnership, P3, school construction work has begun on 18 Edmonton and Calgary sites. We are on track to open spaces for over 12,000 students by September 2010. That's two years sooner than building the same 18 schools through more traditional construction methods, not to mention the cost savings of \$118 million for Alberta taxpayers. The ASAP P3 project provides an efficient, cost-effective model to design, build, finance, and maintain schools over the long term, Mr. Speaker. The key to this model is the private partner proponent, which is responsible for the maintenance of the schools, providing a 30-year warranty while the school boards retain ownership and operations responsibility.

ASAP schools will be built to provincial standards using a core school design. This innovative design features a permanent core building to which high-quality modular classrooms can be added or subtracted to accommodate student enrolment and program needs. Schools will be built to achieve leadership in environmental and energy design, or LEED, silver certification, which includes benefits of a healthy environment for students and staff resulting from improved air quality and the use of natural light.

In October *Summit*, Canada's magazine on public-sector purchasing, in collaboration with the Canadian Public Procurement Council, presented ASAP with a 2008 leadership in public procurement award. We thank them for this achievement, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

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

Support for School Nutrition Programs

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Alone among the provinces this government refuses to provide any direct funding to Alberta schoolchildren who are hungry through no fault of their own. Every day thousands of children, some as young as five and six, sit in Alberta schools with empty stomachs because they were born into the wrong circumstances. The evidence that feeding these children has huge benefits to society is overwhelming, but this government refuses to step up. To the Premier: why doesn't this government fund school nutrition programs for hungry children in Alberta?

1:50

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of programs in place to support families and children. I would say they're one of the best in the country of Canada. The minister responsible for children's services and also the minister responsible for education, who today is the minister of health, can respond to the programs that we have available.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks. Actually, there are no programs for school nutrition.

From 2001 to 2007 government members who are also farmers were paid \$2.3 million in government agriculture support payments – premiums paid by these members only covered about 10 per cent of that – and that's on top of their pay as MLAs and cabinet ministers. Does the Premier see that it's a pretty shocking double standard when this government subsidizes one sector so generously but won't dedicate money to feeding schoolchildren in Alberta who are chronically hungry through no fault of their own?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the leader's coming from. With respect to crop insurance, crop insurance is

funded jointly by the province and the federal government and also by individual farmers. There is no private sector involved in crop insurance, I don't think, in the world unless perhaps in the Netherlands, which is done through their banking system. There's a lot of risk in agriculture, given weather, markets, high costs of fertilizer and chemicals, and this is just one way of trying to find a balance so that farmers can continue to provide the food that we need.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of risk in being hungry, too, if you're a kid.

This week the government will approve more than \$300 million in agriculture subsidies on top of all those programs already in the budget. Farmers do matter, Mr. Speaker, but so do hungry children. To the Premier: if government can support farmers so generously, why can't it feed Alberta's children when they're chronically hungry through no fault of their own?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, if we wouldn't be giving farmers support through other programs, there wouldn't be the food to feed the public. This is one thing they don't understand. In this continent, given some of the trade issues, we might be short of protein in a few years, the reason being the thickening of the border, the loss we have now in the cattle industry, followed by substantial loss in the pork industry. We might have to depend on imports to this country. That's a real issue that we're going to have to overcome at the next world trade talks. That's something these people have no idea of.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government provides protection to farmers for a huge range of risks, from moisture deficiency to waterfowl issues, from margin enhancement benefits to crop revenue risks, from income stabilization to damage from pests, hail, and disease. My question is to the minister of children's services. Will the minister urge this government to offer at least one dedicated program for hungry schoolchildren?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard a lot in the last couple of weeks about reports coming forward on child poverty. I would like to tell the House that the good news is that much of it focuses with respect to my ministry on programs that offer quality, affordable, accessible child care, early intervention, and effective child protection. I think we've seen great strides in moving forward in all three of those areas.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations in a debate in this Assembly said that it's "important to continue cultivating a culture where people take responsibility for some of life's needs, particularly when it comes to children." Then he voted against a program dedicated to feeding hungry schoolchildren in Alberta. Many hungry children in Alberta are aboriginal. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: if it's important to cultivate a culture where people take responsibility for life's needs, why does that policy apply to hungry children but not to government members who are farmers?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, it's a very unfair comparison that the

hon. member is trying to make right now just to suffice for some sort of a political point. I really take some objection to using a situation that some families face for political gain such as is being done here today. That's really unfortunate. Let me say this, though: we have built some incredibly wonderful relationships with the aboriginal community and with all Alberta communities because of some very sound, common-sense, and reasonable policies of this government.

Dr. Taft: In a debate on child poverty on April 17, 2008, the President of the Treasury Board reflected on his own life experience and said that poverty was "an educational learning experience for some." He also voted against a motion to fund school hunger programs, but this minister managed to collect over \$150,000 in subsidies from this government from '01 to '04 on top of his salary. To the President of the Treasury Board: why the double standard?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, there is a standard that we should be held to in this House that should have no exceptions, and it's one of honour. I'm required by the rules in here to address him as an honourable member. Today I can't do that.

The Speaker: There was a point of order there as well. That will be dealt with at the conclusion.

Dr. Taft: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Hunger and poverty are issues for a municipality. This minister received over \$588,000 in ag subsidies since getting elected, only a small portion covered by premiums, and that comes on top of his salary as an MLA and cabinet minister. In the same spirit with which this government helps farmers through tough times, will this minister advocate in cabinet for a dedicated program to help hungry schoolchildren through tough times?

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, speaking for the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I would like to take that brilliant question under advisement and have him get back to him.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Treasurer said in this Assembly in 2006, "If you teach a child about good nutrition, it may be of greater advantage than actually providing them with the food." She then voted against a program to feed hungry schoolchildren. To the Treasurer: in the same spirit with which the Alberta Treasury has paid out over \$2 million in subsidies to government MLAs and cabinet ministers in recent years, will she reconsider her position and advocate in cabinet for a program that feeds hungry children?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the programs that are in Children and Youth Services have been addressed by the minister responsible. There are a number of programs. The hon. member well knows that for hungry schoolchildren in this city and other cities, dependent upon arrangements, the children's authorities, the school boards, and the health authorities often subscribe dollars to those programs in co-operation with other community partnerships.

Mr. Speaker, what's most offensive today, indeed, is that the opposition would tar and feather this group on this side of the House as if we have not been caring for children. There are more dollars in this budget supporting people who need income supports, hungry children than there are in any other budget in Canada.

Dr. Taft: Not true.

Mr. Speaker, the former Member for Drumheller-Stettler received over \$487,000 in payments from '01 to '07; the current Member for Little Bow received \$139,000 in the same period; the Member for Rocky Mountain House \$382,000; and the list goes on. To the Premier: in the next budget, Mr. Premier, will you support a program to feed hungry Alberta schoolchildren who are at risk of hunger through no fault of their own?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as our Treasurer said, we have a number of programs supporting families and children in this province.

One thing just for the record and for whoever may be watching: the incorrect, inaccurate information provided by the leader of the Liberal Party shows how much this person does not know about agriculture. [interjection] Just listen. Just listen. Take a deep breath. Relax. He must have spent a lot of time, I think, with his researchers adding from one year to another the dollars that went to individual members from a number of programs that agriculture has. In every case – in every case – Mr. Speaker, those dollars go to those farmers who have lost much, much more in production either due to loss of the crop or to a substantially huge drop in farm commodity prices. That's covering just a portion of the losses.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Today and tomorrow and yesterday thousands of kids in Alberta went to school hungry through no fault of their own. Alone among provinces this government will not provide any funding to dedicated school nutrition programs. In the next budget, Mr. Premier, will you advocate for a program to provide food to kids who are in school and hungry through no fault of their own?

Mr. Stelmach: I've given him the opportunity to correct the information that he presented in this House. That shows that he's just – I don't know what it is about the individual, but he'll pick on a certain group of Albertans. Yesterday it was a completely different group. It was people that we appointed to the health board. Today it's the farmers in the province of Alberta. Tomorrow probably – I don't know who he's going to select. But it's the negativity day in and day out. Man, oh man, how can you have a good heart being so negative day in and day out yet try to do some good for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Congenital Syphilis Outbreak

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. This Tory government is getting more and more secretive. We're in the midst of a syphilis epidemic. Five babies have died, married people have contracted the infection, and so have seniors, but the health minister still won't give Albertans the facts. It's obvious that the minister of health is running a ministry of secrets, and the Premier is allowing it to continue. My question is to the Premier. Why will you not conduct a public inquiry into the syphilis epidemic so that Albertans can find out the truth?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member made a statement in the House that we were hiding information on this matter. I asked him to write you a letter because you're responsible for the

freedom of information and protection of privacy. I don't know if he managed to scribe that letter overnight, but I hope he will and send it to you so you can investigate because this House is bound by the rules of the act. If we're not living up to the legislation, I want to know about it, but we can't find that out unless you do the investigation.

Mr. Mason: Well, you know, this government has come up with more and more elaborate ways to avoid answering questions. The question I put to the Premier was: will he conduct a public inquiry into the handling of the syphilis epidemic by the Minister of Health and Wellness and his department, which has resulted in the death of five babies? Why are you covering it up? Why are you refusing to answer the question?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to raise a point of order.

Mr. Stelmach: Again, going back to the same, he made a statement in the House. Of course, the House gives immunity. To the students here in the House: a member can say pretty well anything they want. They're protected as long as it's said in this House. All I'm saying is that you're making an allegation that's serious against the government or an officer of the government. Put that in writing; send it to you. You're the officer in charge.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I've made that comment outside the House. I've made that comment inside the House. It's as apparent as the hand in front of my face that this government is covering up what's happened with the syphilis epidemic, that it is mismanaged. The minister has admitted to political interference in that campaign. I've asked the Premier. I wrote him a letter asking him to call a public inquiry. Why won't he do it?

Mr. Stelmach: I'll go right back to my first response. He made an allegation. Put it down in writing; send it to you. You're the officer in charge. I expect to see that letter tomorrow.

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

Softwood Lumber Surge Penalty

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the softwood lumber agreement lumber exporters are to meet monthly export quotas. The Alberta lumber producers recently exceeded their monthly export quotas to the United States and are now in what is called a surge position. My question to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: what does this surge mean for the province's forest industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The softwood lumber agreement assigned Canadian provinces a quota of shipped softwood to the United States. As shipments cross the border, they're tracked, and the amount of lumber crossing the border is reported every day on a website. Alberta producers pay attention to that, but if we go over our quota, then that puts us into a surge position. Normally the export tax is 15 per cent. If we exceed the quota, it goes up to 22 per cent. So the bottom line is that when we go into a surge position on exports, everybody pays more.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplemental to the same minister: given the current state of the forest industry, what impact would the minister expect these additional charges to have on the industry?

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Peace River is right. Currently our lumber industry and producers are in very, very difficult economic times because of the collapse of the housing market in the United States. The surge and the extra tax negatively impact their operations. However, some exporters value cash flow above all else and consider the surge penalty just a cost of doing business. Others for obvious reasons would prefer to avoid the surcharge, but because it's charged against all Alberta producers, they still have to pay the extra tax. So the bottom line is different for each company.

Mr. Oberle: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the extra charges could have a serious impact on at least a portion of the industry, I wonder if the minister could answer: what can be done to ensure that Alberta producers do not exceed the surge limit in the future?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta lumber exporters are responsible for monitoring their own exports. As I've explained, exports are tracked daily and reported on a website. Companies need to be vigilant. They have to see when Alberta is approaching our collective quota and manage their exports accordingly. We are working with industry to improve the monitoring of data, but ultimately it is the companies themselves that are responsible for ensuring that they are in compliance with export limits.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Sustainable Development in the Oil Sands

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring 500 ducks died in a tailings pond, with the result that the world is focusing on Alberta's oil sands. This government's hands-off approach to sustainable development is to blame. Now another report on the serious current and potential impact of the development on birds is going to give us a second black eye. Will the Premier finally admit that failing to manage the growth of the oil sands to ensure enhanced environmental protection has resulted in the negative image Alberta has in the eyes of the world despite the claims of his taxpayer-funded propaganda machine?

Mr. Stelmach: With respect to this latest bird report that was in the paper, I'll have the minister responsible for sustainable resource development answer.

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've read the article, of course, but we haven't had time to look at the report itself. I'd ask the hon. member over there: what other province in Canada has a biodiversity monitoring program? What other province in Canada has a province-wide Water for Life strategy, that looks at water and addresses these issues? What other province as of tomorrow is going to have a land-use framework that integrates land use on a regional basis across the whole province? The answer is only Alberta and only this government.

Mr. Chase: I would call upon the minister to implement the strategy rather than waiting another three years.

To the Minister of Environment. What is obvious is that current extraction methods destroy wetlands and, by consequence, thousands of acres of critical habitat. Can the minister explain why we still do not have a wetlands policy based upon the principle of no net loss despite hollow promises by this government to bring one forward?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, the wetlands policy has been the subject of much discussion and debate. The Water Council has considered the issue, has presented the government with a report, and the government is dealing with it in the appropriate manner and will be coming forward with a policy shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. To the Minister of SRD. Judging from your two-page fact sheet on the oil sands posted today, you are trying to convince everyone that there is no impact on habitat or species from oil sands extraction. We're not fooled. Why are you not putting into place strict regulations on access roads and seismic lines to reduce the impact on critical habitats? Spend the \$24 million on habitat restoration instead of greenwashing.

Dr. Morton: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, Alberta is a North American leader in integrated land management, looking at all the different uses on the land and requiring co-operative use of roads or drilling sites. In terms of recovering the land, we have strict requirements there. I'm not exactly sure what website the hon. member is referring to, but again I would put our record up against any other province when it comes to managing Crown resources.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

2:10 Support for the Horse-racing Industry

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The horse-racing industry has a long and valued history in Alberta. Many Whitecourt-Ste. Anne constituents and farm operators are employed directly or indirectly because of this industry, and they're concerned about the challenges facing Alberta's horse-racing industry. My first question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security, who's responsible for the Horse Racing Alberta Act. What's being done to ensure that both standardbreds and thoroughbreds have equal and fair access to a track given that the new facility in Balzac has not yet been opened as planned for this upcoming year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Horse Racing Alberta is certainly committed to developing a solution that's going to benefit both those breeds. I'm confident that the solution will enable both standardbreds and thoroughbreds to race a sufficient number of days until the new facility opens in Balzac, hopefully as early as 2009. However, Horse Racing Alberta will be announcing details of the proposed 2009 race schedule very shortly.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister. This important industry generates about \$350 million in annual economic benefits to the province. What is this minister doing directly to help ensure that this vital provincial institution continues to provide benefits to Albertans and our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we certainly recognize the very difficult situation for the industry. The horse-racing industry employs more than 8,000 people in our province, with a total of about \$83 million in wages and salaries. Horse racing impacts not only those directly affected but also areas of our agricultural sector. Horse racing is managed, promoted, and regulated by Horse Racing Alberta, which is made up of stakeholders in the industry, but at the end of the day horse racing in Alberta will only remain viable if it's supported by the public.

Mr. VanderBurg: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit. Minister, how will your ministry distribute the funds for the Horse Racing Alberta breeding renewal program, and how will you clearly communicate this to those that are involved in this industry?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, we return a portion of the revenue generated from slot machines located at racetracks to racing entertainment centres. This accounts for about \$48 million, that is returned in a flow-through manner. The racetrack operators generate these dollars. However, funding must be used according to Horse Racing Alberta's business plan, which is monitored by government. A third of those proceeds also go to the Alberta lottery fund, which benefits Albertans in communities across the province, including providing funding for libraries, sporting events, and arts and cultural festivals.

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

Mental Health Services

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Concerns have been raised to me by some of my constituents in the city of Lethbridge. The Canadian Mental Health Association is very concerned regarding the changes that are happening to Alberta's health care delivery. My questions would be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Are all the funds that were allocated for mental health programs under the former regional health authorities going to be tracked to ensure that they're still allocated for mental health programs under the provincial board?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, actually, that's a very good question. One of the things that the folks involved with mental health have expressed concern to me about in the past was that several years ago the government changed the delivery of mental health services, moved it from the Mental Health Board to the regional health authorities. There's been concern expressed that those dollars that were transferred didn't necessarily follow the patient. That is one of the reasons why we made the moves that we did this spring. We will ensure that mental health dollars that are allocated to the Alberta Health Services Board go to mental health services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will nongovernmental organizations be consulted in the development of contract negotiations that reflect local realities? Will they also have a voice as to the expectations and the content of the contract template?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, wherever possible, we need to and will

continue to hopefully increase the working relationships with nonprofit organizations and community organizations in the treatment of mental health. We need to rely very much on community organizations, and that certainly won't change under the new model.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I think it's very important that local realities are included in the negotiations.

Will there be adequate funding under Alberta Health Services towards the not-for-profit mental health delivery sector, funding that is equal to the importance of the services that these agencies provide to Albertans?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, that's a judgmental question. The question was: would there be adequate funding? We believe that we do fund health care across the board adequately, in fact, probably better than anywhere else in the country. Now, there will always be debates about whether a particular portion of health care is funded adequately. We will take every measure possible to ensure that we have a mental health treatment program in this province that is the best in the country.

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

Public-private Partnerships for School Construction

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, despite concerns expressed by some groups across the province, the opposition parties among them, the government appears to be determined to move ahead with public-private partnerships, or P3s, as a model to deliver new schools across Alberta. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure. Minister, why are you so determined to move ahead with this concept if there are issues outstanding and unresolved?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how you can call saving Albertans \$118 million while at the same time providing 12,000 additional spaces for students two years sooner than traditional methods an issue. That's exactly what this P3 project is delivering to Albertans. It's major essential infrastructure that we're getting faster and for less dollars. In fact, jurisdictions across Canada and internationally are studying our process because of its success.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Again to the same minister: can you tell the House, please, exactly how you know that Canada and international jurisdictions are actually interested and aware of what Alberta is doing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ASAP P3 concept for schools is unique to North America, using a design, build, finance, and maintain model. The key aspects, of course, are that we have contractors maintaining a 30-year warranty on these buildings while at the same time the school boards own and operate them. We

know that our peers are taking notice because interest has come to us from far and wide, including Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and Britain, as examples. Also, just this past week the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships at their 2008 national conference gave us the third award of this year, the merit award for social infrastructure procurement.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's very interesting.

Perhaps the most important question to Albertans at this time is: in light of the global economic turnaround can the minister offer some arguments to substantiate that it's a good idea still to pursue P3 projects for these schools?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely a great idea, and it's full steam ahead. The contract is signed, the financing is in place, and the deal is secure. In fact, we've started construction on all 18 sites. We will be delivering these schools two years earlier than conventional methods. They will be there and available in September 2010, and we're very pleased to see that.

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

Out-of-province Health Services

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm reluctant today to ask the minister of health any questions because I see that he's reading Standing Orders. I hate to interrupt him, but I believe I'm going to have to in light of keeping this government accountable.

Out-of-province health care spending has doubled in the past six years. My first question is to the minister of health. Given that \$74 million was spent last year on out-of-province health care, who sets the budget for this program?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the budget for Alberta Health and Wellness is set by this Assembly, as the member well knows. Out-of-country payments are part of the Alberta Health and Wellness budget.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: why has the budget for out-of-province health care expenditures doubled from \$32 million six years ago to over \$74 million now?

2:20

Mr. Liepert: Well, my belief would be that more Albertans have applied to be reimbursed and have been granted reimbursement. That's why the dollars would go up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: can the hon. minister please explain how wait times for necessary medical services factor into the consideration of the out-of-province health services committee's decisions?

Mr. Liepert: Well, there is a wait time issue around some surgery procedures. However, you know, technology and new treatments have exploded upon the international scene, Mr. Speaker. With the advent of the Internet and all of the global communications that now

exist, Albertans have found the ability to seek remedies outside of the province, and many have done that and, in some cases, have actually been reimbursed. In other cases they have not.

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

Livestock and Meat Strategy

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday this government appointed two new board members to the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency. It's no surprise that one has extensive ties to the WTO and NAFTA and that the other managed a large foreign beef production system. It's obvious that the government is putting packers and agricorp before local producers. To the agriculture minister: why are you stacking the deck in favour of big business at the expense of the family farm?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member thinks that having someone on that board that is tied to agriculture when he happens to be the person that helped Canada negotiate the NAFTA agreement – boy, I was very proud of that. Hon. member, what's the problem here?

Ms Notley: The problem is that your livestock strategy isn't helping small producers. It's loading farmers up with more and more costs while giving feedlots and packers a free ride. At the end of the day, your program is killing the family farm, and you know it. To the minister: isn't it more important to protect the family farm than to do the bidding of your friends in agricorp?

Mr. Groeneveld: My friends in agricorp? Okay. I'll think about that one.

Do you honestly believe that I would implement the Alberta livestock and meat strategy to supplement the demise of the family farm? Exactly the opposite is true. I don't know where you're getting your information, but I think that maybe I would double-check it.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, next week the Alberta Beef Producers will actually be discussing whether to call for this minister's resignation. Clearly, they don't agree that your strategy is helping them. This government needs to back off the Wheat Board and let local farmers select their ALMA reps. To the same minister: why won't you stop trying to kill the family farm and let producers have a say in their future?

Mr. Groeneveld: Interesting information. How the hon. member knows what the Alberta Beef Producers are going to bring forward at their meeting next week . . .

Mr. Mason: We talked to them.

Ms Notley: You should try it.

Mr. Groeneveld: Okay. You know what? You're much better looking anyway.

Impact of Oil Sands Development on Migratory Birds

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Speaker, a recently released report predicts that oil sands development will cause the boreal forest to lose from 6

million to 166 million birds over the next 30 to 50 years. Well, the stated impact is very wide ranging and vague. Is the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development aware of such consequences to bird populations in this area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The impact of industrial development on wildlife is an important issue, and we take it seriously in this government. That's why, as I indicated earlier, we've already implemented a biodiversity monitoring system, a Water for Life system, and as of tomorrow we'll be releasing our land-use framework and going ahead on regional land planning. We welcome rigorous scientific studies that address the issue of impact on wildlife, but we're not interested in made-for-media sensational statistics. We look forward to reviewing this report and deciding where it falls on that spectrum.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. What is his department specifically doing to protect bird populations in the oil sands area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by putting this in context. The minable oil sands area covers an area about two-thirds the size of Calgary whereas the boreal forest is nine times the size of the province of Alberta. The minable area covers one-100th of 1 per cent of the boreal forest. So if there's a problem with songbirds in the boreal forest, it's not related to what's happening on one-100th of 1 per cent of the land mass. Having said that, I would point out that in Alberta 13 per cent of the boreal forest is protected. We require reclamation. In fact, a number of us visited a reclamation area this summer. It had beavers, birds, and fish.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: how will planning for this area in the future release of the land-use framework of the minister minimize the impact of development on birds and their populations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Yes. To finish that last question, there was a duck, as well, on that reclaimed land.

As we put together the regional plans, Mr. Speaker, we will be balancing environmental considerations with economic and social considerations. The land-use regional plans will integrate our various policies on oil sands, aboriginal affairs, parks and protected places, and water. The focus will be regional, and also it will look at cumulative effects, not just one project on a one-off basis but what's likely to happen over the near future in that area. As I said before, no other jurisdiction in Canada has as sophisticated and integrated a land-use program. This government is committed to the responsible and sustainable development of our resources.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Funding affordable housing in Alberta remains a serious concern for many, especially students. The small increase in student loans for living allowances have not done enough, and students still cannot afford their rent, having to focus on work instead of their studies. To the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology or Minister of Infrastructure: when will additional affordable residence spaces be built at Alberta's postsecondary institutions so that students have safe places to live without adding to their debt?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll take the member's question under advisement and discuss it with the advanced education minister.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I hope you have that discussion quickly.

The University of Calgary accommodates 7.4 per cent of students in residency, and it's 11.4 per cent for the U of A. This government seems to have a love affair with P3s, but they are both flawed and costly. Will the minister commit to building new residences using public dollars only rather than contracting out to private companies, creating further cost to students and taxpayers 32 years down the road?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I'll speak more slowly again this time. Our last P3 project – and that was for 18 schools – has received two national awards and one provincial award this year and is being studied by people from across the world because of the savings to our taxpayers in Alberta while, at the same time, providing over 12,000 new seats for students in this province two years quicker than traditional methods.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Will the minister please consider tabling those traditional construction comparators?

The President of the Treasury Board recognized yesterday evening the importance of investing in universities. Will he take the initiative to live up to the government's promise to make postsecondary education affordable and accessible for all students? The Minister of Advanced Education and Technology has so far failed to do so, and it doesn't appear that the Minister of Infrastructure is going to help him out.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, we had ample opportunity in here in the spring to debate the budget estimates. I don't think there's any province in Canada that spends more on education and advanced education than Alberta. We repeat it time and time again. The students really, quite honestly, don't care who owns the building. They just want to learn, and that seems to contradict – their biggest concern is about who owns the building.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care Premiums

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Talk outside of Alberta refers to a sky-is-falling scenario, and so it may be with the economic situation creating problems with budgets across this nation.

My first question is to the minister of health. Is your department still going ahead with the plan to drop Alberta health care premiums despite the current economic situation?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the decision to eliminate health care premiums on January 1, 2009, was never one of economics. It was that the idea of health care premiums had passed its time of usefulness. It was no longer serving the purpose that it was designed to do when they were first introduced. The answer is: yes, they will be eliminated January 1, 2009.

2:30

Ms Calahasen: Knowing that we're going to do that in January, then, what economic repercussions of this are to be expected on the health care budget that you'll be bringing forward?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government does not have dedicated funding, so the health care premiums did not go towards offsetting the budget of Alberta Health and Wellness. Health care premiums were one of the revenue streams that the minister of finance would use in preparing a budget, so that revenue stream will not be there in the next fiscal year.

Ms Calahasen: Albertans need to be aware of the benefits that are available to them and what will be coming, so what communication plan do you have in place to ensure Albertans are aware of everything that's going to be coming to them in the new year?

Mr. Liepert: Well, there are numerous initiatives that have taken place and are currently taking place. There is a media awareness campaign that is under way, there is communication with employers who pay the health care premiums on behalf of their employees, and obviously any communication that MLAs would have with their constituents would be appreciated.

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

Continuing Care Strategy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A provincial service model for continuing care in the province is to be built on the findings of the McKinsey report, Alberta health's vision for continuing care report, and recognized best practices models. The seven rank-ordered short-term initiatives are to be actioned or implemented January 2009. My questions are to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. How do the people responsible for this implementation of initiatives do so when the government has not released the McKinsey report, the Alberta Health and Wellness vision for continuing care, or the recognized best practices models?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The questions that I've been asked are about reports that are through the Department of Health and Wellness, so I think they would be better directed towards Health and Wellness.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not certain where the member gets her information that somehow something is going to change on January 1. That is not the case. But we will be releasing a continuing care strategy in the coming weeks.

Ms Blakeman: I'm quoting from a document by the Alberta seniors' housing association, which is talking about something from the Alberta Health Services seniors' care integration initiatives, revised October 29, 2008.

My next question to the same minister: will the government be changing the January 2009 deadline for the sector to implement these initiatives, seeing that none of the required documents have been released and this is all now due four weeks from now and that time includes Christmas?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is quoting from a publication that is not a government publication. I know of no rule changes that are going to go into effect that are substantive that would need to be changed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports: given that many seniors in Alberta do not have adequate shelter, will the minister commit to developing a policy exclusively dealing with affordable living options for seniors?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, we are aware that seniors require some assistance in affordable living supports, and we do have a program that we are handling at this point in time. It's called the affordable supportive living initiative. There are \$78 million in grants going out, two proposals that provide 50 per cent of the funding for new units. We hope to have 800 more new affordable supportive living units within the next year, and we have more money for the next two years – \$50 million for the second year, \$50 million for the third year – and another 800 units from those programs as well.

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

Calgary Ring Road

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are eager to see further development of the Calgary ring road, including the expansion of the road south of 17th Avenue S.E. As it currently stands, the road will come to an abrupt end at 17th Avenue. To the Minister of Transportation: why did the government not build an interchange at this intersection?

Mr. Ouellette: Well, Mr. Speaker, the interchange will be built once we start extending the ring road south of 17th Avenue S.E. It didn't make sense to build it now because we'd either have to build half an interchange or have half an interchange sit idle until we extend that road southward. I can assure the member that there will be an interchange there and that it will be part of the project to extend Stoney Trail at a later date.

Mr. Bhullar: Again to the same minister: does his department have a plan in place to handle the traffic that will converge upon this intersection at 17th Avenue when the northeast leg is completed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is yes. Part of the project includes upgrades to the 17th Avenue intersection. These upgrades will move the traffic safely and efficiently until the interchange is done.

Mr. Bhullar: My final question is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Since the intersection will be constructed with the southeast leg of the ring road, can the minister tell me and my constituents when this leg will be constructed?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that we have completed the functional planning for the southeast leg. We're also doing an additional engineering study right now that looks at how the ring road will affect adjacent city roads and local road accesses. We have acquired most of the land, so we are a step closer, but we can't really move ahead until we are sure that we have all the money in place. So I would ask the member to stay tuned.

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

Environmentally Responsible Packaging

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this House a private member's bill was forwarded by a Progressive Conservative member that led to discussions about banning incandescent light bulbs and using energy efficient appliances. This is a step in the right direction. To the Minister of Environment. The city of Toronto announced that it will charge a nickel for plastic bags. Two major grocery chains are also clamping down on plastic bags. Will the minister admit that even though we have to look to packaging in general, banning plastic bags is a step in the right direction that can be easily implemented?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, I would accept part of the premise that the member makes, that banning plastic bags could be a good thing. What I don't agree with is that it would be easily implemented. That's the part that I think causes the confusion and causes the problem. That's why I've suggested that if we're going to get into issues of packaging, it should be done as a larger question rather than picking little bits and pieces here and there and plastic bags in particular.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the minister answered similarly in that he was putting heavy reliance on the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment for his reductions re the environment. Still we haven't seen much happening. Why do we not just have an Alberta-based solution and take the lead on this issue?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is not averse to taking a leadership role. In fact, just two weeks ago we announced that we would be putting a ban on weed and feed fertilizer in this province. I want to assure the hon. member that this is an issue that we're prepared to lead on if we're not able to bring our fellow provinces up to speed at an appropriate time, but we have not yet concluded the discussions at the national level.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Again thank you, Mr. Speaker. I note that this council of ministers has been going for quite some time, over 20 years. Why hasn't the banning of plastic bags in all provinces been put on the table, and why didn't you put it on the table then, at your last set of meetings?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the issue of packaging is on the table. It's not necessary for me to put it on the table; it's already there. The council will be meeting again in February, and I'm hoping that that will be part of the discussion that we deal with.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 102 questions and responses today.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor will be calling upon the House at 3 o'clock, so we will continue our Routine with Members' Statements.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Country of Origin Labelling

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring attention to a very important trade issue affecting Alberta's agriculture industry: the U.S. mandatory country of origin labelling, commonly referred to as COOL. Mandatory COOL ignores the reality of an integrated North American agrifood industry. When implemented, COOL imposes new and unnecessary costs on Alberta's livestock and meat sector.

Mr. Speaker, the U.S. is Alberta's largest agricultural trade partner, and we value this partnership, but COOL is hurting our industry as well as U.S. processors and consumers. During these uncertain economic times we must look to increase trade, not erect barriers and protectionist policies.

Yesterday the Canadian government announced that it is initiating the World Trade Organization dispute settlement process to resolve this critical trade issue. The Alberta government is pleased that our federal colleagues are taking decisive action. We will continue to work with them to defend our producers' rights to a fair and competitive trade market. However, we recognize that the WTO process could take years while significant marketing opportunities and potential profits are lost.

Barriers to the U.S. market such as COOL highlight the importance of diversifying our agriculture export trade, a key element of the Alberta livestock and meat strategy. Regaining in markets, expanding in growing markets such as in Asia, and the measures outlined in the strategy are absolutely necessary to bring competitiveness and sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage everyone in this Legislature and in our agriculture industry to work together to take advantage of new markets and efforts to grow the Alberta agricultural industry as laid out in the Alberta livestock and meat strategy.

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

Culture of Innovation in Education

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the need to have an education system in our province that fosters a culture of innovation, a culture of innovation that looks beyond the typical number of years students are expected to spend in high school, a culture that encourages students to learn and possibly encourages them to finish their diploma requirements early. We should offer incentives for high school students to graduate early. This would foster a culture of innovation in our schools that promotes competency over completion.

If we promote early graduation, we shift the focus from merely moving from one grade to another to a focus on learning, growing, knowledge, and innovation. Students will be motivated and driven

to learn. We need our students to be the most innovative in the world to ensure we have a competitive, knowledge-based economy, and promoting early graduation will do just that.

There are also students who require more time to fully grasp course material. Opportunities for these students who need extra time to develop core skills and learn the materials is something that could also be encouraged. It is also important, especially in early years, when reading and writing skills are being cultivated, to make sure students are keeping up their grade level. Far too often I hear stories from constituents of students being passed along from one grade to another when their basic skills do not meet their grade level. Maybe more of these students should be in summer programs.

We need our students to be powered by purpose, equipped with world-class skills and knowledge, and driven to be innovative; therefore, we must provide them with the motivation to be innovative leaders of tomorrow.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 616 postsecondary students' signatures urging the government of Alberta to "consider a onetime funding package delivered to universities on an equitable basis to allow for maintenance, and an annual funding envelope to provide for adequate ongoing preventative maintenance."

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a chart that we made this morning. It is regarding out-of-province health care spending for 2002-03 through to 2007-08. The total for that spending in the six fiscal years is \$328 million.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mrs. Jablonski, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, pursuant to the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act the persons with developmental disabilities community boards consolidated annual report 2006-2007 and the same report for 2007-2008.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Goudreau, Minister of Employment and Immigration, pursuant to the Regulated Accounting Profession Act the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta 2007-2008 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Redford, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Law Society of Alberta annual report 2007; returns to orders of the Assembly MR18, MR21, and MR22 asked for by Mr. Hehr on October 27, 2008; responses to written questions 22, 23, and 24 asked for by Mr. Hehr on October 27, 2008.

On behalf of Ms Calahasen, hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, *Globe and Mail* article dated September 26, 2007, entitled Transferring Problem Pupils a Band-aid Fix, Critics Say.

On behalf of Mr. Johnston, hon. Member for Calgary-Hays,

Statistics Canada website summary results for 2007-2008 article entitled How Many Times Have You Been Bullied at School in the Last Month? and *Pediatrics* article dated May 2004 entitled Associations between Overweight and Obesity with Bullying Behaviors in School-Aged Children.

The Speaker: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, my understanding is that His Honour will attend upon the House at 3 o'clock. Is it the wish to have His Honour attend earlier?

Hon. Members: Yes.

The Speaker: Then I'm going to advise all members that we will return after the presence of His Honour to the two points of order that were raised. This may affect the Routine a bit because I'm supposed to be calling Orders of the Day now. We'll just go on to the next one, which I will call anyway.

The hon. the Premier, you would like to say something.

2:50

Royal Assent

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, and the Premier entered the Chamber. His Honour took his place upon the throne]

His Honour: Hon. members, please be seated.

The Speaker: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sittings passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

The Clerk: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- | | |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Security Services and Investigators Act |
| 18 | Film and Video Classification Act |
| 23 | Weed Control Act |
| 24 | Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act |
| 27 | Funeral Services Amendment Act, 2008 |
| 29 | Alberta Capital Finance Authority Amendment Act, 2008 |
| 32 | Meat Inspection Amendment Act, 2008 |

- 33 Agriculture Financial Services Amendment Act, 2008
- 39 Court Statutes Amendment Act, 2008
- 40 Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Amendment Act, 2008
- 41 Municipal Government Amendment Act, 2008 (No. 2)
- 42 Health Governance Transition Act
- 43 Emergency Health Services Act
- 44 Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2008
- 45 Statistics Bureau Amendment Act, 2008
- 46 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2008
- 47 Mines and Minerals (New Royalty Framework) Amendment Act, 2008
- 48 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2008
- 49 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2008
- 50 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Amendment Act, 2008
- 206 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated his assent]

The Clerk: In Her Majesty's name His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today under sections 23(h), (i), and (j). In question period earlier today the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that somehow I had received money from the government between the years 2001 and 2004, inferring impropriety.

Mr. Speaker, there may be, but I don't think anyone has had to divest themselves of any more business than I have coming in here. After I was elected in 2000-2001, I sold the shares in our family business, a construction business, not because the Ethics Commissioner or anyone said I had to or should. I understood that if the government was spending money in the area where my family had worked for over 30 years, it would be the proper thing to do, and I did.

I then proceeded to divest myself of a small share in a medical clinic that a group of us put together in Vermilion because we couldn't attract doctors. I assure you that that was not a money-making proposition; however, I thought that because of the money that the government spends on health care, there may be a hint that somehow it would be improper and I should divest myself of that.

When I was appointed chair of the standing policy committee on agriculture and transportation in 2004, I divested myself of any interest in Snelgrove Farms, which I can tell you I did not do easily. That is something I lived on. I thought that if there was a possibility that there could be an inference that somehow I'd give special treatment to anyone, including myself or agriculture, I needed to remove that.

Now, the hon. member did not say that Snelgrove Farms had received payments from AFSC under the current programs within the guidelines established by this Legislature. He said that I had

received money from the government between 2001 and 2004. I guess, Mr. Speaker, I live by the old rule. If you take something that's not yours, whether you are caught or not, you are still a thief. If you tell a lie or say things about people that are not true, whether you're called on it or not, you are still a liar. What the rest of history records is irrelevant from that point of view.

Mr. Speaker, when hon. members in this House make an allegation about improper handling of money to the President of the Treasury Board, regardless of who he is, I think you set this entire Assembly into disrespect. That is akin to somehow equating the health minister as not wanting to look after people or the children's services minister not looking after children. Well, to suggest that this Premier, this Assembly, or this province doesn't hold us to a higher standard is not true. It is something that not only do I believe to be true, I believe I have.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the to-and-fro of question period and the debate of these bills. I for one will admit that occasionally we may stretch the boundaries of what might be parliamentary . . .

An Hon. Member: Decorum.

Mr. Snelgrove: That too.

Mr. Speaker, I have never and would never accuse anyone of improperly accepting money in this position. It probably, I would say, caught me completely off guard because if there is one thing that I've done, it's to make sure that that simply couldn't happen. We all go through a rigorous meeting with the Ethics Commissioner every year. Every single business transaction that we have done since we've been elected has been vetted with and approved by the Ethics Commissioner. So for the hon. member to stand and accuse me as the President of the Treasury Board or, more importantly, as an individual in this House of improperly getting money that I never got – he may be referring to payments made to the corporation that is Snelgrove Farms, that is owned by my three brothers, which when I was growing up and until I divested myself I was a shareholder of. That's what he's probably addressing

Mr. Speaker, the point that I received anything from this government that has not been tabled in this Assembly under MLA's salaries, benefits, or expenses, is simply untrue and unconscionable, and I demand that he retract that statement.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on this point of order.

3:00

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the President of the Treasury Board. It's somewhat ironic that I was just thinking earlier today, after debate we had in this House last night, how I enjoy and appreciate the fact that we have different approaches to issues but that this particular member actually engages with us.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, my job as Leader of the Opposition I see as in part questioning government priorities, challenging how decisions are made, and advocating for people who need help, in this case particularly schoolchildren. This is what I believe to be the question I read, and Mr. Speaker will have the advantage of the Blues. I should say that the whole point here wasn't that there's anything inappropriate or whatever the terms the President of the Treasury Board used. I wasn't accusing him of anything underhanded or around the rules or anything else. What I was illustrating is how this government has very generous programs for farmers and doesn't have any direct funding for school nutrition programs, and I was challenging that in the most pointed way I could.

The question, I believe, that I read, Mr. Speaker, reads like this.

In a debate on child poverty on April 17, 2008, the President of the Treasury Board reflected on his own life experience and said that poverty was “an educational learning experience for some.”

That’s a matter of *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker. I then continued.

He also voted against a motion to fund a school hunger program.

Also a matter of *Hansard*. It was a recorded vote.

This same minister collected over \$150,000 in agriculture subsidies from this government from 2001 to 2004 on top of his salary.

A simple statement of fact based on documents that are filed every year, government documents filed in this Assembly. I can actually cite from that original one: Snelgrove, and it lists the details. We can go through that, Mr. Speaker.

Then my question to the President of the Treasury Board:

Why the double standard?

My point is simply: why do we have a government program that is so generous, on one hand, to farmers and particularly to farmers who are members of this government or of note to them and alone among the provinces – if the minister would like me to table this, I can – Alberta provides no direct funding for school nutrition programs? It was a simple statement of facts, all of which I can back up.

If you read the question, there was no impugning of motive, no assassination of character, no questioning that it was inappropriate. In fact, there are a whole host of extremely generous government programs to help farmers through tough times. My point was: gee, maybe we could have the same thing to help hungry schoolchildren through tough times, Mr. Speaker.

I’ll wait for your ruling, Mr. Speaker, but to the best of my knowledge this was pretty much a factual question, well within the purview of what I understand my job to be.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House on this point of order.

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I could have called a point of order because my comments are related to what happened. I got dragged into that quagmire as well. I find it very offensive, as the President of the Treasury Board did, when in fact I received nothing personally. Nothing.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member want to raise his own point?

Mr. Lund: Yes. Sure. I’ll call a point of order.

The Speaker: Then please sit down.

There are others on this point of order?

The chair listened very attentively, and the chair heard, well, what seemed to be conflicting versions of facts. The President of the Treasury Board indicated that he had managed to receive zero dollars. The Leader of the Official Opposition says that he has a document in front of him that states that the President of the Treasury Board received, filed as having claimed, \$150,000. Is this correct, to my understanding? First of all, to the President of the Treasury Board: am I correct that that’s what you said?

Mr. Snelgrove: That’s correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Am I understanding, Leader of the Official Opposition, that you have a document in front of you that says that the President of the Treasury Board received \$150,000?

Dr. Taft: Yes. It’s from a document tabled in this Assembly, Report of Selected Payments to Members and Former Members of the

Legislative Assembly and Persons Directly Associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly. This particular one is from 2003.

The Speaker: Well, first of all, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition said that he did not have the advantage of the Blues. Well, it was the leader’s question, so he didn’t really need to have the Blues. Here’s exactly what was said, and it does differ slightly from what the hon. leader said. The first section of the question was so, and then the Leader of the Official Opposition goes on to say:

He also voted against a motion to fund school hunger programs, but this minister managed to collect over \$150,000 in subsidies from this government from ’01 to ’04 on top of his salary. To the President of the Treasury Board: why the double standard?

Now, the long-standing tradition, of course, in this House is that individual members are free to raise questions of members of Executive Council to call the government to account. To call the government to account. Questions should deal, essentially, with government policy and matters of that type. It’s very, very interesting how often I suggest that members might take some homework, do some reading. Some members either may not be in the House when I give my little lectures or, I guess, haven’t done the homework.

There are some interesting comments on page 522 in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I’m just going to quote a couple of paragraphs from page 522. First of all,

the Speaker will not allow a Member to refer to another Member by name even if the Member is quoting from a document such as a newspaper article. As the Chair noted, a Member “cannot do indirectly what cannot be done directly.”

But, more importantly,

remarks directed specifically at another Member which question that Member’s integrity, honesty or character are not in order. A Member will be requested to withdraw offensive remarks, allegations, or accusations of impropriety directed towards another Member.

Now, the context in which we sit, the context in which we raise our questions and provide our answers, is the milieu in which we talk about it. One may argue subjectively that one did not mean to say a certain thing, but it would certainly be recognized subjectively by another person to believe that that certain thing was stated. There’s no doubt at all in this case, in the chair’s view, that the President of the Treasury Board honestly believes that his integrity and his character have been attacked. That would require the question to be disapproved, and the member would be “requested to withdraw offensive remarks, allegations, or accusations of impropriety directed towards another Member.”

Now, in looking at the question, the chair would be hard pressed to basically say that there was a question of impropriety. If a law is passed in the province of Alberta and all members are eligible to receive something under that law and if they do receive it, that’s certainly not impropriety. That’s just being a law-abiding citizen. In this case, the President of the Treasury Board clearly has stated that he has received nothing. The Leader of the Official Opposition claims from this paper that an associate of the President of the Treasury Board received something, presumably, but did not emphatically show that the President of the Treasury Board received something, presumably. So it would suggest to me, unless there’s additional information that somebody wants to provide to me, that quite clearly this is not appropriate, and I’m going to ask the Leader of the Official Opposition to withdraw his comments with respect to this matter.

3:10

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, I was genuinely going from a document that’s the property of this Assembly. I did not intend to impugn the

character of the President of the Treasury Board. I thought I was simply stating facts according to a series of documents tabled in this Assembly. They're actually public documents or statements. If I offended the Treasurer on that particular issue, my intent was not to offend him. My intent was to point out what I see as contradictions in government policy and double standards in government policy. That's what I was asking about.

I will say, quite honestly, that I had no intention of impugning his character. I was challenging this government's double standards. If the minister took offence on that basis, that was not my intent. I regret that. For the sake of moving on, I'll withdraw those comments.

The Speaker: Well, hon. member, I think that the House will accept that, but I hope it's not for the sake of moving on. I hope it's for the integrity that's required of all of us as Members of the Legislative Assembly and as gentlemen. I hope that's the purpose of it.

Now, I'm going to read this section again.

Remarks directed specifically at another Member which question that Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order. A Member will be requested to withdraw offensive remarks, allegations or accusations of impropriety directed towards another Member.

This is not the first time that I've had an opportunity this fall session to rise and caution with respect to this kind of matter. It's going on way too often. Quite frankly, in recent days I probably could have ruled out virtually two-thirds of all the questions. This comes from all corners of the House. We've got to smarten up. Deal with government policy; deal with policy; stick to policy. Personal views, personal opinions have no place in this House, none whatsoever. It matters not what a minister thinks. A minister is part of a collective called a cabinet. The cabinet has only one voice in the British parliamentary system.

Now, I suspect that we're going to continue with several more in exactly the same vein here today, so we'll be here till 5:30.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, please, on your point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I rise under the same point of order, 23(h) and (i). In question period today the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood – and I believe I have the exact quote of the question here – said:

The question I put to the Premier was: will he conduct a public inquiry into the handling of the syphilis epidemic by the Minister of Health and Wellness and his department, which has resulted in the death of five babies?

I think this is an incredibly serious accusation by this particular member. He has no proof that the deaths of any babies can be attributed either to the actions of our department or to this minister. These are serious allegations against both myself and members of the civil service of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, alleging that anyone or any group of individuals is responsible for anyone's death is a serious matter and, frankly, is inappropriate conduct for any member of this Assembly, and I would presume that he would withdraw those remarks.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to respond to this. Some things we do know about the syphilis outbreak. We do know that there has been an epidemic. We do know that five babies have died. We do know that an education program to deal with this matter was cancelled, and the minister admitted at the health policy field committee that he directed that it be cancelled. We do know that four doctors departed, and we do know that they're unable to speak

to the reasons for their departure, but we do know that there have been a number of allegations of interference with the doctors in their attempts, including allegations that some interference occurred from the previous deputy minister. We know that the minister claimed that the outbreak was limited to marginalized groups, specifically sex trade workers and itinerant tradespeople, but we also have obtained documentation internal to the department to show that it had escaped into the general population, and that document was available within the department prior to the minister making those statements. We don't know the reasons for the doctors' departure.

Mr. Speaker, when I asked that question, it was extemporaneous. I departed from my notes, and that's why I'm at a disadvantage with respect to that, not having the Blues. If the wording of the question was as the minister has said, then I think he has misunderstood it, probably because the framing of the question was careless on my part. I did not intend to allege that interference had directly led to the death of the babies. What I heard the minister say was that there was interference with the handling of the epidemic, which is a fact, and that the epidemic has led to the deaths of the five babies. I did not mean or intend to imply that the minister's interference or the interference of his officials had led directly to the deaths of the babies, only that the epidemic had caused those deaths. If, through my carelessness in framing that, I have led the minister to believe that I've made a direct allegation against him or his officials, then I apologize.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, fine with that?

The hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

Mr. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying earlier, the situation that really bothered me is somewhat similar to the situation that the President of the Treasury Board found himself in. The fact is that with our family operation there was an agreement among my family when I first was elected that I would take nothing out of the farm. I've been here for 19 years, and that is what has happened over all that time. The one thing that really bothers me is that if the member wants to use the income that came to the farm, he should at least check and see that condition before making it sound like this was something that came to me.

As well, I have commented to folks as far as the way that's recorded. My name is mentioned. Yes, I do own land. Yes, it is farmed, but it's farmed by the corporation, not by me.

The thing that the member did not mention is the fact that we pay premiums. I don't remember how much in premiums we paid in total over those 19 years, but I can tell you that last year the premium was just about \$15,000. Do the math, and see what that adds up to. I'm not saying that every year it was that amount, but the fact is that we do pay premiums, and it's not just a token.

I really find it offensive when these kinds of things are brought up, making it sound like there's some big source of revenue there that is available to, in this case, all farmers, which is just not true.

3:20

The Speaker: I think, hon. member, we may have dealt with the whole question just a little earlier, but I accept that.

Look, perhaps there are a couple of lessons coming out of this. If we don't collectively get our heads around this kind of an issue, when we return in the spring, I can see a whole bunch of people on the government side having done research on virtually every allocation that every member of the opposition has, including any outside pensions they get, any jobs, any income that will come from a direct associate perhaps. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has a direct associate, I believe, an elected person of the city of

Edmonton. They'll be throwing that back and forth. If we don't get our heads around this, then in essence this is only going to degenerate and deteriorate.

There is one other thing, though. This all seems to stem from the listing and the publication of certain documents that a lot of members have advised me and talked to me about; that is, these disclosure statements that either come under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Finance and Enterprise or the hon. President of the Treasury Board and certainly do come under the jurisdiction of the Speaker because he has to assemble on behalf of the Legislative Assembly certain documentation.

In this member's view, for years, decades there has been way too much information contained in those documents that is totally unnecessary, and it seems today to have become very misleading. Perhaps the hon. members might wish to look at this themselves to try to avoid and avert unfortunate issues that need not be dealt with at a particular time. That's just a thought process for the dying days of this particular fall session.

Hon. members, I'm assuming that we're going to be rising tomorrow, so it's customary at this time that I call upon the Deputy Speaker to make a presentation on behalf of all members to the pages. Would that be okay?

Page Recognition

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to do, I could say, the most important annual task of a Deputy Speaker. Hon. members, each day of the session we are served by the tireless efforts of our pages. Daily they show patience and understanding for our many demands. They put in their time as much as any of us, and they also add their youthfulness to our Assembly. So on behalf of all the members of this Assembly I would like to give each page a small Christmas gift to say thank you and to wish a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to each one and their families. I would also like to thank all the hon. members for their contribution to this gift.

Now I would ask our head page, Robyn Peters, to come forward and receive your personal gift and also help distribute the gifts to the other pages.

I would like to ask all the members to join me in the appreciation towards our pages. [applause]

The Speaker: Hon. members, Robyn Peters is the head page. She's a student at Campus Saint-Jean, part of the University of Alberta. This will be her last week with us. She is retiring, so she is becoming a part of the page alumni. She will continue her studies. Currently her studies are in French. She's a very delightful young woman. She wants to travel. She wants to obtain a pilot's licence. She wants to start a family. I suspect that given a couple of decades from now she'll find her way back to this Assembly.

All the best to all of you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 53

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General I would like to move third reading of Bill 53.

The Speaker: Participation, or should I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 53 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Bill 51 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008 (No. 2)

The Deputy Chair: Any comments or questions or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Hon. President of the Treasury Board, would you wish to speak first?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to move Bill 51, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008 (No.2), through to Committee of the Whole.

The Deputy Chair: Fine. Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. President of the Treasury Board, for moving that so I can get up and discuss it. I appreciate that.

There were some ministries that we were not able to discuss and put some questions on the floor during the Committee of Supply budget process that was held here last week, and I would like to put our issues on the table. If it's possible for ministers to respond to us, that would be much appreciated, but I understand that this is not, in fact, Committee of Supply.

That for me is part of the problem. I think we need to come to a better agreement and, if I could suggest this for consideration by the House leaders in the new year, to look at some sort of a formula that we could use to fairly arrive at a reasonable amount of time to debate supplementary supply and interim supply but particularly supplementary supply estimates in the Committee of Supply.

I had mentioned previously that we were trying to debate 14 ministries and just under a billion dollars, I think about \$42,000 short of a billion bucks, in 150 minutes. In fact, when you take off the time to rise and report, it was actually about 135 minutes, so we didn't get through all of the ministries. I think that is a flaw in our process at this time.

I understand that the government feels that they've talked about this enough and that they've run it through their internal committees, and I appreciate that for many of the backbenchers that are here this is a boring exercise. They are not encouraged to participate – fair enough – and they feel that they've already dealt with this. But this is an open Chamber. This is part of the democratic process as much as this government wishes to see it foreshortened or perhaps even done away with. Nonetheless, I will protect and promote that ability to discuss those issues in this Chamber with the public able to attend and to witness us and to put those questions on the record.

Of course, the difference for us is that with Committee of Supply there is an expectation that there's a give-and-take. There is a question-and-answer expectation during those estimate debates. Again, we've been held to a one-sitting opportunity, which is, essentially, either an afternoon or an evening, as I say, approxi-

mately 135 minutes or a little bit more than two hours, two hours and 15 minutes' worth of time if we get started immediately following the Routine.

We've been held to that amount of time, and I don't think it's serving us in the opposition well. We're working with, as I've argued, very few resources – and I know the third party would agree with me on that – and a very short amount of time to be able to prepare questions and to put issues on the table. So I think there is a problem.

I know that the President of the Treasury Board took issue with me, in fact, raising that and said that, well, I'd wasted time questioning him on policy and ideology. But to me that is a part of what we should be doing, and I think that if we don't have enough time to do that as part of the allocated time, then we need to look at the allocated time. I don't think that I should be regimented into a specific listing of questions that are prescribed by the government in order to suit the government's timeline. It was clearly of great interest to myself and a number of others because I watched how quickly his comments turned up in the media. He's a way more popular guy than he thought he was, so I gave him that opportunity to get his beliefs out there.

3:30

I am going to start with Infrastructure. In the Department of Infrastructure there was a request for \$2,655,000 related to the Alberta schools alternative procurement project – in other words, the P3 projects – another \$54,700,000 for natural gas rebates, and just a million, \$1.588 million, for the capital for emergent projects program. My question around the extra money for the P3 projects is that we already had money allocated to this. I have been told many times with great stout defence and great energy by members of the government that, you know, P3s are a way to save money. So I was really intrigued when I saw additional funding turn up in supplementary supply for P3s. My question back to the government is: if this is such a great cost-saving venture and you've done all your homework and you've proven over and over and over again how great this is, then why are we having to find additional money for it? Why do we need another \$2,655,000 for Infrastructure?

Now, this money for the most part is coming through vote 2.0.3, capital and accommodation projects, and the 2008-09 original budget was \$42,250,000. We've added about 5 per cent or so to that budget, but I'm still really interested, given the very strong defence the government has had about cost savings, what a great way to save money and what a huge amount of money has been saved to the government, in why in fact we are looking at additional money allocated to this project through supplementary supply if it's such a great money saver.

I had spoken earlier on the natural gas rebates, and I understand why this project is happening. You're able to do this under a sort of disaster allocation, and I think that also can apply to economic times. But, you know, natural gas rebates, rebates of any kind are bad economics. It does not address the problem. It skews the market. It is an interference. Sometimes you may need to do that. Certainly, I think we're all very aware – and I'm sure a number of people are nipping back to the lounges to check up on the latest news on what's happening federally – of how the economy affects us and what governments can or cannot do to try and get a better result for the economy. But rebates long term are a bad idea, and I have seen these rebates over and over again.

It's a tough call in this province, and I admit that, boy. I've got constituents, and when we talked about the energy rebates a couple of years ago, lots of people phoned me and said: "Don't speak against these, Laurie. I really need this money. You know, it costs

so many thousand dollars to heat my little house, which has no insulation to speak of and crappy windows and the landlord won't fix anything and I'm just stuck here and I have to pay what those energy costs are. Please don't, literally, leave me out in the cold here." I understand what that is, but we do not improve the situation, and five years later we're standing here and nothing has been done to that little house that my constituent was renting. There have been no conservation attempts there. We've moved nowhere forward. All we did was pay energy companies a bunch of money through a subsidy that was pulled out of the government coffers. It's just bad economics, and I keep hearing people say, "We shouldn't be doing this, but," and then it happens again.

The other question under Infrastructure was around the capital for emergent projects program. This program was listed in the capital plan 2008-2011, saying that this \$330 million, which was the original budget, was

to address emerging capital needs, which could include roads, schools, health and post-secondary facilities. Annual funding for this program is \$100 million; however, it can fluctuate due to slower than anticipated progress on some projects, resulting in the carry over of funds from prior years. A portion of this funding has already been committed to specific projects over 2008-11.

I'm assuming the \$330 million is across the three years. You're talking about a hundred million a year, as it mentions, and now we're adding money to it. I don't understand why. If this is supposed to be a flexible program, then let it be a flexible program. Why are you having to add money into it? It doesn't make sense. You can answer this for me: does it mean that the hundred million that was allocated for this year has been exceeded, and therefore it needs to have an injection of \$1,588,000 to top it up? But I would think that if you had a \$330 million pot, where it was acknowledged that it could go over or it could go under, you've already covered that. So there is a lack of a compelling argument here as to why these additional sums are sought.

We have an emergent capital fund. It's supposed to deal with things that the government couldn't plan for, and it seems they can't even hold the line on that. It's a small amount of money. It's not going to bring down the government, frankly. But to me it is an indication of some of the omissions in the planning and in the rigour of that management process that I keep finding with the government, where it says: "Oh, look. We've got this project. It's flexible. We can go up; we can go down." Then we end up with them coming back in a supplementary supply saying: and we need more. There's an explanation that's not being given completely here, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I noticed that my colleague who is the critic for Municipal Affairs is here, and she might want to speak to that area. So I'm going to move over that to Service Alberta. With Service Alberta, Mr. Speaker, this is really interesting, but it's also quite a cool ministry. I'm always fascinated by the amount of stuff that is tucked in there. This originally had what used to be consumer and corporate affairs, so it's a ministry that's near and dear to my heart because it is around consumer protection. But it also has some things in it that bring all of the issues around privacy of personal information and the protection of it, surveillance. All of those issues are also kind of swimming around in this same department, so I'm always really interested in it.

Now, what we're seeing this time out is a request for \$36,500,000 to provide for the government of Alberta information management and technology strategy. Now, the line item that I can find this under – it's coming under two line items, vote 3.2.2 and vote 3.2.3. The first one is enterprise services and the second one is network services. When I go and look at what the budget estimate was for this particular budget, 3.2.2, enterprise services, was an '08-09

estimate budget of \$25,435,000 and more or less the same forecast and budget from the previous year of '07-08. We're adding more to this line item than actually was in the budget before, which, when you think about it, is a lot of money. You had a budget of \$25 million and change, almost 25 and a half million dollars. You're adding 34 and a half million dollars to it in supplementary supply. That's pretty significant, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

You have to start asking questions about: did you not see this one coming? It's actually a larger amount than your original budget. What is the problem that's trying to be addressed here? Are you going to be able to address it with that amount of money?

The second line item is 3.2.3, which in the original budget is \$18,055,000, and to that we're adding \$2 million, not a significant percentage of money given what the original budget was, but, you know, it's better than 10 per cent that you're adding to it. Well, certainly, in the not-for-profit world we were admonished. We had a 10 per cent contingency fee in there, but boy, oh boy, we'd better not be using it or we'd be accused of being terrible managers. I'm always interested when I see a budget that varies on a supplementary supply by more than 10 per cent, and that's clearly what we have here. I am interested in the minister's explanation. I know she's listening today, so I'm hoping that she might be able to get some time on the floor and answer what that's about.

This is not a new strategy either. It's not as though we didn't know what we were getting into this first year, so it's a little bit of an adjustment because things were unexpected, and we had no experience with it. Clearly, those two line items have been in – well, this budget goes back to '06-07 – at least three years back. This is not a new program, so I'm expecting the minister and her department to know what they're doing there. I'm questioning why the need for this funding wasn't recognized in the original budget. Additional to that, I'm wondering where this capital investment is going to be directed. How is this funding going to be prioritized in the way that it's allocated? It's, as I say, more than the original request.

I'm wondering if this is connected in any way – it might be – to the observations that were made by the Auditor General in his October 2008 report. He is quite concerned that we're found severely lacking in the security of our databases, and that ultimately, I think, does fall under Service Alberta. Of course, if I am wrong on this, I'm sure the minister will correct me.

This government holds a lot of sensitive information that could in the wrong hands but also just in different hands be used for purposes that the collection of it was not authorized for nor the use nor the disclosure of it. The Auditor General is very clear that reasonable security arrangements against the risk, that risk of the information being used for reasons for which it was not collected, is borne by the government.

One of the things that they did find – they're asking for a number of things here. They did find that there was inadequate IT security, that Service Alberta provides shared infrastructure but has no authority over the other entities, that there is a decentralized IT approach in the government but that that very same decentralized approach for the programs and services poses the IT security problems in itself. Confidential information was at risk because there were no central policies held. The information itself is not secure.

It's pretty damning stuff. When we're looking at things like Bill 52, the Health Information Act amendment, which has been sent to the policy field committee on health for review and we're expecting it to come back in some form or another in the spring, this takes on

added importance. The Auditor General has audited our security systems and is telling us that we're not doing a good job at it, that we're not very good at it.

I always have a bit of a hard time with conspiracy theories. Sometimes they just sound like they come out of a novel. But I collect enough information and keep very alive to different articles and studies that are done around privacy information.

I'll have to come back again.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have spoken to the supplementary supply estimates previous to this, but there certainly are a number of departments that I could still speak to. Actually, I had asked a number of questions to the Housing and Urban Affairs minister, who was more than pleased and, I think, had she had the time, could have answered the questions for me. So I may take a few more minutes and perhaps restate some of those.

One of the things that I think does bear repeating, though, when I look at the money that's over and above a budget is that if I ran my personal money and banking this way, I would be up to my eyeballs in debt. I'd have to be using my credit card to be able to bail me out of the fact that I had not planned correctly. Certainly, if I went over in my constituency office, I'm sure we'd all hear in this House about how I was incapable of planning the budget for my constituency office.

I just really don't think that this is poor budgeting because over the last 10 years \$1.4 billion was the average for the year for supplementary supply. So I don't think it's just poor planning; I think it's the way this government budgets. It obviously has become a behaviour that they're quite comfortable with. I know that year after year after year from this side of the House it's brought to their attention that this really isn't a proper budgeting procedure. However, they seem to think that it works just fine, and it continues.

Now, I am looking at Housing and Urban Affairs. I can probably go for a few minutes, and then if the minister is prepared to perhaps answer a few questions, we could go from there. I'm not sure that the minister is prepared.

Mrs. Fritz: If I can get some questions . . .

Ms Pastoor: Okay. Never mind. I'll just ask the questions, and I can get the answers in writing if that would be appropriate. Thank you, Madam Minister.

The ongoing financial commitment in the development of Parsons Creek in Fort McMurray I think is a very important one. I think that a lot of these questions, of course, are going to hinge on the fact that economic times have changed since a lot of these things were put on the drawing board. Just where does that stand at this point in time in the priorities of Housing and Urban Affairs?

3:50

Another thing is the \$33,500,000 for the homeless and eviction prevention fund. How many people who are close to being homeless in Alberta are receiving funds from this program? I'm not saying that it's not a good program. I'm not saying that it's not necessary. However, I'm not sure how closely monitored this program is because what happens is that all we've done is take public money to line the pockets of the private landlords, that know full well that if they up the price, they will be paid. It's certainly to their advantage to try to I guess the word would be gouge as much as they can while the gouging is good. The budgeted amount for 2008-09 for the program was \$44 million. That's 75 per cent more than was

budgeted originally to fund this program, so I'm not sure where that money is going to go. Again, it may be going into the pockets of the landlords.

I'm not saying that we haven't taken some good steps towards this, but one of the things that really has to be addressed is the root cause of homelessness; namely, poverty. I think we've had a heated discussion about the fact that so many of our kids go to school hungry. Certainly, that is because of poverty. Yes, we could be looking at why this is happening in their homes. This is where part of this affordable housing and the root causes of poverty and homelessness come in. First, we have to put a roof over their heads, and then we have to get the support programs that go along that help these people.

There is a very successful program in Lethbridge that has been done through Womanspace. What they've actually done is help the women in these homeless shelters to get an identity. Many of these people don't even have a birth certificate. Heavens, that they would even go to a bank because they wouldn't even be looked at. They can't get a phone. They can't get anything because they have no identity. This program has been very successful in helping women get identities not only for themselves but for their children. Yes, they are in some kind of transitional home, but they have got the supports that will help these people go forward. They don't want to sit in these homes and do nothing. They truly do want a job. They want someone to help them and say: "You know, you are undereducated. How can we get you educated? But here's what you can do in the meantime."

These support programs that go along with homeless initiatives are, in my mind, of paramount importance. I know that we have taken some good steps forward on that within Housing and Urban Affairs, but I would like to see, perhaps, that priority even move up a little bit higher. The homelessness secretariat I know has been established, and they have a nine-year plan. I'm really hoping that what I just spoke about in terms of support is a huge part of that nine-year plan and to be able to get some kind of evaluations on exactly how many people we have helped. I know the numbers are good, but I'm just not sure that we are, perhaps, publishing them. I, for one, would like to know, if we've spent X number of dollars, how many people we have actually helped.

I'll just quickly go on to Municipal Affairs at this point. One of my questions. They're asking for expense and equipment for \$27,500,000, and it's

requested to provide \$30,000,000 for disaster recovery and municipal wildfire assistance programs, partially offset by a \$2,500,000 lapse in the Tank Site Remediation program as a result of lower than expected program uptake.

Now, I am very interested in that because I've had a couple of cases come across my desk in the last three years when, in fact, they were told that this tank remediation program was wrapped up and that there actually were no more dollars in it. Why were these people told that when now they're saying that there's less than expected program uptake? At some point I would appreciate an answer. The minister, I'm sure, will be aware of this and be able to give me a written answer.

Why did it generate lower than expected participation? I would also like the date on when they actually – to my understanding that program was closed down. Then they were saying that they had \$2,500,000 less than expected. So are these additional funds that were left over, and if so, where did they go, and why weren't they used for that tank site remediation?

Under Solicitor General and Public Security one of the things is the energy security unit. They're asking for extra money on this. Are the increased costs for this unit, the energy security unit designed to provide security for members of the ERCB and the

AUC, going to be a permanent expenditure? Now, I may be wrong, but my understanding is that during some of the hearings very disgruntled, frustrated citizens of this province actually dared to raise their voice against a board member when clearly they weren't being listened to and the board member's body language was fairly dismissive. They actually raised their voice. As a result, well, heavenly days, now we have to get protection for our boards instead of actually just sitting down with common sense and addressing what were clearly very, very personal and very, very important issues to these people. The other thing is: is this just a one-time allocation based on a perceived enhanced threat level, and why could that increase not wait until next year's budget?

There also was something else on the disturbance of the oil pipelines, which I understand is delivered by private security companies, but they actually answer to the oil companies. One of the things that came out of the conversations around that was that the people that they have hired have not been trained properly. So is some of this money going to actually go towards helping to protect these pipelines that, in fact, we as Albertans own? Not directly, but certainly we own the stuff that's flowing through these pipes. Just from a security point of view and knowing that our province is safe, I think that this is an important conversation as to how the money is flowing through this particular department.

Sustainable resources. The mountain pine beetle problem, which is huge. I just really feel that had this government not been so I'm going to use the word arrogant, not listening probably 10 years ago when they were warned about the mountain pine beetle coming through from B.C., had there been at that time a mile-long strip along the Alberta-B.C. border burned on both sides, I can assure you that we wouldn't be in the mess we are in today. We certainly could have contained it from our side of the border.

An Hon. Member: Talk to Parks Canada.

Ms Pastoor: That was not Parks Canada on this side of the border. It's only part of it. The fact that by clear-cutting the Crowsnest Pass, the wind that comes through that pass and is funneled through that pass and will now not have those trees stopping is going to be enormous – enormous. Not to talk about the watershed that's going to be disrupted.

I'd like to know what the detailed breakdown of the \$15 million for the continuation of the ground survey and control operations entails. What will the money be spent on? I think they clearly think that they've spent it well because now they're just going to chop down everything that they can see. Part of the money is being used for controlled burns to stop the advancement of the mountain pine beetle. I think I've addressed that one. This is under Sustainable Resource Development for the firefighting costs. [interjections]

4:00

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Member for Lethbridge-East has the floor.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The other thing that comes up under Sustainable Resource Development is chronic wasting disease. I think that we really need to know specifically what programs this allocation will be used for and how we're helping prevent the spread of this into and, certainly, within Alberta. I know that the minister has spoken to this question; however, I think that the evaluation programs perhaps aren't as detailed as they could be. Has the minister considered or studied whether the presence of game farms in Alberta has contributed to the spread of chronic wasting disease? It's something that's been brought up on numerous occasions, and I'm just not clear on how much study has been put into that.

Of course, the other issue that keeps coming forward is the grizzly bear recovery program. Perhaps people who aren't fortunate enough to get out into the wilderness and to have actually seen bears in their habitat don't appreciate the importance of protecting our wildlife in this province. Some of this has come up. They're asking for \$134,373,000. That's an awful lot of money. Some of it could have waited for the next budget so that we can actually give it the due attention and the dollars that it deserves, so that we can get a good evaluation on how our wildlife is going to be protected.

One of the other things is how the money is going to be spent on preventing wolf attacks on livestock. I'm just wondering if we're not getting a little bit too civitified out here. You know what? We've always had wolves, and we've always had livestock. In the past I think the farmers have lost some, and I know that even losing one cow, particularly during calving time, is expensive to the farmer. However, I think that we have to have a little bit better program than just going out and shooting them all. Wolves certainly are valuable in the food chain in how nature looks after itself.

I think, Mr. Chair, that I've covered a couple of the departments that I didn't have a chance to before, so with that, thank you very much.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to speak at this time on supplementary supply. We go through the various departments and the additional spending requests, and it never ceases to amaze me or surprise me how one could consider this government to be frugal. Sometimes we have to go through this process two times a year, as you know. We look at the amounts over the last number of years, and we look at the various times in the fiscal year when we've needed an additional request for supplementary supply. There's quite a list here, and it's a significant amount of money.

We'll just go back 10 years. Over that 10-year period it's over \$13 billion. On a yearly basis, of course, that's \$1.3 billion in additional money. We go through the budget process. The minister of health, among others, is very fond and often quick to respond in question period to suggest: there's a budget process; the entire House had a look at this, and the members opposite should be satisfied. But when we look at total government expenditures and we look at the history of this government over the past decade, certainly, no effort has been made to control the budget process or to set a budget and stick to it. In fact, it was probably three years ago, Mr. Chairman, I believe, when three days after the budget the government had already announced additional significant changes. We can just use that as one example.

I need to remind the House of another example, and this happened, Mr. Chairman, in the Legislative Offices Committee, that held a meeting on Friday. There was a lot of discussion from various members over information technology and how much is being spent and how much should be spent and why we're spending this amount. So I thought I would get the public accounts, the blue books, and just go through and find some numbers and just see how much we were spending. We're spending a lot. Are we getting value for money? We don't know.

We can look at another government expenditure. I will use out-of-province health care spending. Now, there can be any number of reasons why out-of-province health care spending is increasing. We talked about this earlier, in question period. How this budget is determined is still a mystery. In 2002-03 the province spent over \$36 million, and it goes up, up, and up. In 2005-06 they were spending \$55 million, or \$20 million more, and then two years later we're spending an additional \$20 million for out-of-province health

care. For the year ended March 31, 2008, out-of-province health care spending totalled \$74 million. Over that period of six years we spent \$328 million, Mr. Chairman.

We're spending a lot of money, and one would have to question: are the wait-lists so long here in this province and the specialists so scarce that we have to send sick Albertans or those in need of medical attention to another province or another state to get medical attention? Now, Mr. Chairman, if that is the case and our wait-lists are really a big issue, this spending trend is telling us a number of things. Certainly, the first thing it would be telling us is that perhaps this dramatic increase, this doubling of spending on out-of-province health care, is a result of our long wait-lists. Now, the minister is shaking his head there. Hopefully, he has information to clarify this.

4:10

Now, perhaps we should have a look at the budget request from the minister of health. We look at the one-time financial assistance. We know that some of this money is being used to pay down the accumulated deficit of the Calgary regional health authority. The Calgary regional health authority has over the years had small and then larger and then sometimes very little deficit. But in the information provided to the House, the accumulated deficit as of March 31, 2008, for the Calgary regional health authority is \$192 million, for Chinook it's \$2 million, for East Central it's \$5.6 million, for Peace Country it's \$14 million – and I'll have some more questions about Peace Country here in a minute – and the rest of them had net accumulated surpluses, including, of course, Capital health, which had the largest at \$35 million. We're looking at a portion of this money here going to reduce some of that debt, if not all of it, for some respective health authorities, Mr. Chairman.

Now, whether that's right or wrong with this centralization before privatization scheme I can't say, but I do know that this centralization has come along quickly, and the privatization end of this is coming slowly, and I am concerned. When any government and any ministry makes major, major changes and publicly admits that there was no cost-benefit analysis done on how this is going to improve service, reduce wait times, and control costs, I have my suspicions, and taxpayers have their concerns.

Taxpayers. There's only one – the taxpayer is making a contribution to each level of government. We always have to remember that. If they're finally getting suspicious of this government and this government's insistence that they're fiscally prudent, taxpayers have every right to question this government. Whether it's golf course grants, which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has talked about, or anything else, our priorities seem to be a little bit twisted.

That's one portion of the health authorities centralization plan that this budget is attempting to address. But the other one is this \$80 million for transition costs. Now, I heard a lot of promises. I looked at the provincial budget, at the capital projects that were in the fiscal plan. I did see where Grande Prairie was to have some extension to their hospital. Certainly, Sherwood Park was mentioned. Medicine Hat, Mr. Chairman, was mentioned. There were lots of places across the province that were mentioned, and that fiscal plan was part of the budget earlier this spring. Where all these projects are I don't know. Some of them have been scaled back. Some of them, I've been told, have been cancelled, yet we need this additional \$80 million in transition costs.

We know of some of the severance packages that were issued earlier, and I'm interested to know that Peace Country health region was one of the health regions that initially did not have severance agreements in place, or they were under negotiation at the time the other ones were announced here earlier in the fall. I'm wondering if the minister can update us on the progress with the Peace Country health region on the severance packages that are being negotiated for

the officials that were let go or no longer needed there. What sort of severance packages are being negotiated? I can understand about East Central because that's sort of the straw man for this whole centralization plan, or straw board, I should say. But it's interesting that the severance package in Peace Country health region has not been concluded that I'm aware of today. Now, we do know that they had some rather strong questions regarding the centralization plan. They did not feel in the Peace Country region that this superboard was going to meet their needs. I've been reading some very interesting articles from the local papers up there regarding how they feel their needs are not being addressed with this centralization scheme.

Also, with Mr. Jim Saunders, who was the COO of the Alberta Health Services Board, I was surprised – the minister is going to have to forgive me, and I'm going to publicly apologize. I used a lot of pneumatic tools when I was younger, and I am deaf. I didn't hear his response yesterday to his supplemental response. Whenever this side of the House talks, hon. minister, I have difficulty hearing you, and I apologize. However, you did say, and it's on the record – I checked it in *Hansard* this morning; it was the first thing I did when I came into the office – that he's no longer with the Alberta Health Services Board. With the length of time the gentleman was there, I still don't know why he left. Maybe I'll ask that in question period tomorrow. Maybe you can provide the information to us today and save me the trouble. The hon. minister has stated that he's no longer there, and I'm interested to know if there was a severance package for this gentleman and how much it was.

That would conclude my comments at this time on the department of health, but I need to skip a couple of departments and go to Infrastructure. I was interested to hear the exchange between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the Minister of Infrastructure today in question period regarding P3s. I got the distinct impression from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford that he wasn't so sure that P3s were such a good idea. I was listening with interest to his questions. On this side, this ear, I could hear him. Mr. Chairman, the skepticism that the hon. member had I think is warranted.

Now, the Minister of Infrastructure gave the reply crafted by the Public Affairs Bureau, but if this is such a good program and if it controls costs so effectively or so efficiently, why do we need to come to the Alberta schools alternative procurement project? Why do we need to throw that into supplementary supply? If these costs are ironclad and locked in, why do we have to do that? We're asking for \$2.6 million for planning related to the Alberta schools alternative procurement project.

If we're really careful here and we look at the Education budget, we will see that we're looking for an additional \$25 million and that \$20 million is to be earmarked also for the Alberta schools alternative procurement statutory expense. Now, some of that is a replacement project for a senior high school in Calgary, but explain to me, if P3s are controlling costs so effectively, why you need this additional money for the schools in Edmonton and Calgary.

I was also told that the projects are on time. How are the projects progressing in Calgary with the P3s? Have we turned sod? Have we turned a greenfield site into a construction site? How is this working? What penalties or fees are there if these P3 projects do not occur on time?

4:20

It's interesting to note, all hon. members of the House, that the ICT wiring for the P3 projects, those 18 schools, is not included in the cost. I would like to know from the Minister of Infrastructure why that is so. I'm told that ICT wiring will add a significant cost. It doesn't make sense when you've got one contractor doing this

work and you have another contractor that has to come in and install this wiring. Why would it not be included in there? I think it would add to costs, and of course that additional cost is going to be placed in the school board's budget. Why is that happening? What measures have been taken? None of the furnishings or anything are included in the cost of these P3 projects. What details can the minister provide on providing funding to the school boards to pay for the desks and all the other furnishings that are necessary? Perhaps they're going to close schools in another area of the city and move the desks. I don't know. Perhaps this is what the government is going to tell the school boards to do.

Ms Blakeman: Isn't that what they call a surplus? That's what they always call where all the old desks and cupboards and shelves and stuff are. It's surplus supply.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, surplus supply. Maybe they're going to take it from one school to the new schools.

Honeywell is going to have the O and M contract, and those operation and maintenance contracts are all conveniently indexed to inflation with the P3 contracts.

Ms Blakeman: What's O and M?

Mr. MacDonald: O and M is operation and maintenance, and Honeywell has got the contract. I'm sure that was through a public tender, but I would like to get the details on that because we do have this inflation index. I would encourage all hon. members to look at those design, build, finance, and maintenance, or DBFM, contracts that are on the Internet for the P3s. Check it out for yourself, and you'll see the schedule, where these operations and maintenance contracts are indexed to inflation, and it seems quite generous. We had this sort of robust exchange earlier this afternoon in the House regarding agricultural subsidies and lunch programs for children. This is yet another example where we have a P3 contract indexed for inflation, but AISH benefits are not indexed for inflation. SFI benefits are not indexed for inflation, but that contract is.

The same applies over in the Minister of Transportation's corner with the P3s for the Anthony Henday Drive and the Stoney Trail in Calgary. All those maintenance contracts are conveniently indexed. Those guys are not going to lose any money over the next 32 years. The Minister of Transportation can correct me if I'm wrong, but over the next 32 years, for the life of those contracts, they're indexed to inflation. Mr. Chairman, I'm startled that we even have a car counter. I should say a vehicle counter because the counter wouldn't distinguish between a big truck and a little car as much as the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View would like it to. You have these car counters on the Henday Drive . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] Dam.

Thanks.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I'll be very brief because out of all of that, as is pretty typical, the member didn't ask a lot of questions. He made a lot of comments. He asked a lot of questions about things that have absolutely nothing to do with this bill. But there was one question in there.

First of all, in my supplementary comments to the member yesterday, when I provided the additional information, I said something to the effect that the member didn't listen to the answer. I apologize if he, like me, has hearing problems on occasion. If that is the case, I apologize to the member.

The question that I want to respond to, though, is what the member asked about severance for Peace Country health. I can't give him an answer now, but I will find out whether the severance

package has been concluded with the former CEO of Peace Country health. Without getting into details, there were some issues dragging on. We didn't want to delay the release of all of the other CEOs any longer. I don't know if they've been resolved yet, but I'll get the information.

The second one, relative to Mr. Saunders. There was no severance involved in his departure. He had a contract. He was in a position on an interim basis. The contract concluded, and he's gone on to other matters.

Those would be the only questions that I determined out of there that had anything to do with the bill.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I had a full head of steam there, and it will take me a minute to get back up to speed.

Mr. Rogers: Question.

Ms Blakeman: Oh, someone is very eager for me to keep speaking. That would be the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, and I'm sure his colleagues will appreciate it when we all get to stay here tonight and tomorrow and tomorrow night.

My question. I was talking about the need for Service Alberta to take the recommendations of the Auditor General seriously and the concerns that were being raised around database security and the risk to personal information that the Auditor General had identified. A big piece of that is that, strictly speaking, the government has failed to give ultimate authority and responsibility for information security to any one person, so my apologies to the Minister of Service Alberta if I have inadvertently burdened her with this responsibility, but to me it's the logical place that it goes.

The Auditor General is referencing that the Minister of Service Alberta has in fact responded to the recommendations that have been made previously around IT control frameworks, project management offices, creating a standardized systems development life cycle, and developing a security awareness program. The Auditor General's cross-ministry report on protecting information assets goes on to talk about web applications and network security. This, of course, can all be found in his October 2008 report in between pages 51 and 92. So my question specifically to Service Alberta was: what was this being directed toward? What was this capital investment? Was this around implementing what the Auditor General was advising?

To be fair, given the timing, I doubt it because this report from the Auditor General was released in October of 2008. Supplementary supply is coming out at the end of November, so approximately four to six weeks later. That would be very fast turnaround for a government department to be reacting. Now, perhaps with the management letter the ministry was already aware of the concerns and had started to work on it.

This is part of the frustration, Mr. Chair, that what we get is a document, supplementary supply estimates '08-09, and on page 58 it says, "This supplementary amount of \$36,500,000 is requested to provide for the Government of Alberta Information Management and Technology Strategy." That's it: 36 and a half million dollars and one sentence, one short sentence. There isn't even a comma in there that could squeak in an extra subclause. I have no idea what this is, and I don't know how I would be expected to know what this is. I'm a member of the opposition, so supposedly I have access to materials that would help me understand this, and I don't.

Now, I have gone back and looked at other budgets, and I cross-referenced that when I was talking about it earlier in what the whole budget was and the fact that one of these amounts is larger than the original budget, but I have no idea what this is. I went back in

Hansard and checked to see if we'd been given some sort of additional explanation from the President of the Treasury Board when he introduced the supplementary supply, and no, so I have no idea what this is. I probably would support it if I knew what it was, but I don't.

4:30

It would help if we got a bit more information on these supplementary supply documents. It's just that sometimes I feel the government is being cutesy. There's no other description for it. I mean, what is the big secret here? Just tell us what it's being used for. One presumes that if it's a good reason, that argument will stand on its own. But trying to give us a one-sentence explanation on 36 and a half million dollars – I don't know what else to say – is not enough information for any reasonable person to understand and to be able to make an informed decision on. I would expect better, and I will look forward to hearing exactly what that money is for.

Now, the last ministry that we were examining was Transportation. This was the last of the ones that we didn't get a chance to talk about the other day. In here again another one sentence: "This supplementary amount of \$86,000,000 is requested to provide for off-site servicing work related to the Fort McMurray Community Development Plan." This is coming under vote 3.0.6, municipal water/waste-water program and Water for Life. It states here that the original gross amount was \$204 million, a supplementary supply of \$86 million, for a total gross amount of \$290 million.

As always, I will absolutely believe you until I go and check it. In the previous year, '07-08, the budget for this was \$159,300,000, but the forecast was \$135 million. The year prior to that, '06-07, it was \$75 million. So significant increases in the budget. This is quite a bounce. It's almost a 50 per cent increase. It's a lot of money.

Now, my understanding is that this was developing in Fort McMurray. The Crown owned all of the extra land, and in order to build more houses up there, the Crown – sorry, it's also being called public lands now. The government had to release the land to be developed, which it did, finally, in two chunks, I think, to develop two different communities. The question is: what is this? It looks like it's one big payment to the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. It's related to an announcement of June 23, 2008, as is, by the way, almost everything in here. It was all released sometime over the summer. The government had a field day: two new communities for Fort McMurray and an RMWB council report on the issue. Specifically, what is the off-site servicing that's in question? That's not covered in the media release. It's not covered in the numbers. It's not covered in the reason that is supplied here. Perhaps the Minister of Transportation would like to tell us.

Additional questions are: is this everything that's going to be required for this so-called off-site work, or will we be expecting an additional budget increase when we look at the budget for '09-10? It's a lot of extra money to be adding in, so I'm wondering what you're using it for. I mean, is it the municipal water/waste-water program, or is it Water for Life? Those are actually two different things. Can the minister answer whether or not this is part of a P3? Has it been contracted out, or has this been developed as part of a P3 contract? Who's accountable for this? Who's actually doing this work that's going to get paid this \$86 million, which is not chump change? Who's responsible for doing this? Where's the line of accountability, seeing as I can't get the minister to tell us what the money is for?

Those were the ministries we were not able to speak about before. I just wanted to raise a couple of other issues that were brought to my attention. One was around the Alberta Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health. I know this is an issue close to the

minister of health's heart, particularly children's mental health, which I'm happy to hear about. I'm just noting that they're very concerned that mental health be kept high on the agenda, and I would like to believe that that's going to happen, but frankly it's a struggle, and the minister knows it is. Mental health always ends up in hard competition with the rest of the things that are in that department. I'm wondering if he has specific strategies now that mental health services are being pulled under the superboard. Does he have specific strategies in mind as the minister overseeing this to keep a priority rating on mental health services?

I had another constituent who was raising – oh, yeah. This is another one that sort of falls under the minister of health. One of the issues that we've had happen a couple of times – and this person has actually detailed everything that happened to him – is where Capital health gets called in a rental situation. They will eventually come, but a lot of times they don't have the enforcement officers to make sure that the landlord complies with the ruling. One, there's a problem in enough staff being able to come out and actually look at what the problem is. Then they identify it and say: "Yes, you must fix this. There's mould in the ceiling. There's water dripping down the walls. There are all kinds of problems." Then they don't have enough staff to do any follow-up.

You've now got a tenant, in this particular case David. He's told to vacate so that the landlord can clean the unit up and fix it, so he makes arrangements to move. Then he's being given notice-to-enter notices so that the landlord can show the unit to a new person. David is pretty sure that the landlord has no intention of fixing anything. They're just going to paint it and re-rent it without ever addressing the leak in the bathroom ceiling. That, of course, is going to cause mould problems for somebody further down the line.

Another tenant I wrote to the minister about had multiple issues, and we just could not get Capital health to actually enforce all of the infractions upon the landlord. It's very frustrating, especially when there's a health issue involved. I just wanted to put that on the record. Without there being a Capital health authority, I can't see how there's going to be an increased emphasis on that kind of very front-line service. I'd be interested in hearing the minister's thoughts on it because in one of his responses he referred back to me saying that this was a landlord problem, to go deal with it that way. But it's not a landlord problem; it's a Capital health problem in their ability to enforce it.

Those were the questions I wanted to put on the record. Thank you very much for the opportunity to do so.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to give a couple of brief comments with respect to the whole Auditor General's report. When I became minister, one of the first things I did was meet with the Auditor General and begin to work on a number of initiatives. Most certainly, the report that was released in October indicated many of the things that Service Alberta is doing already.

I'm very aware of the integrity in protecting Albertans' information. The hon. member made a comment about: burdened with the responsibility of information security. That is indeed Service Alberta, and the chief security officer is resident through Service Alberta. To me that's a natural evolution of where it should be. So I just wanted to address that.

4:40

With respect to your comments on the supplementary estimate of

\$36.5 million, I'm happy to provide some further details to you. I can mention that many of the items in there refer to working collaboratively within government and making changes across government so that the systems are better and it's better integrated. Working and discussing with my colleagues is something that is very important. I'm very happy to provide further information to you once we go through *Hansard*.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Chairman, I recognize that in Committee of the Whole questions and comments can be very wide ranging, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the answers have to be wide ranging. We're on the appropriation bill, two specific expenditures for Alberta Health and Wellness, and one of them is not for mould. I'm not going to start getting into general issues around health and wellness. If there are specifics related to the bill, then I've provided a number of answers, but I don't think any of the issues that were raised here relate to this bill.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 51 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 51, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2008 (No. 2).

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 51. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On that note, I would move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 4:44 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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