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The 27th Legislature
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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

Second Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Stevens: Well, thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's truly my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two individuals from the Russian presidential academy for state service, Dr. Nikolai Volgin, professor of Economics and dean of the Labour and Social Policy Department; and Dr. Vera Smorchkova, head of the northern program at the Russian Academy of Public Administration and assistant to the chairman of the Northern and Indigenous Affairs Committee. Accompanying Drs. Volgin and Smorchkova is their interpreter, Andre Dimitri. I'd also like to introduce somebody who is no stranger to this Assembly, Dr. Mike Percy, dean of the University of Alberta School of Business.

The delegation is here representing the Russian presidential academy for state service, which trains and provides professional education for all levels of Russian state service. Alberta is proud to host these guests and to assist them in learning more about our postsecondary education system. I would ask that our honoured guests please rise at this time and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

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

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of students from Springbank community high school. Accompanying them are eight parents and teachers: Mrs. Deanna Ring, Miss Natalie Casey, Mr. Dave Fraser, Mrs. Tammy Hodgson, Mr. Terry Stein, Ms Cynthia Johansen, Mrs. Christine Whitney, and Mr. Ron Klippert. They're taking a tour of the Legislature and studying how the government of Alberta works. I'd like them to please rise and receive the traditional warm reception and welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today as part of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie I have the privilege of introducing to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly representatives from the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean. The Campus Saint-Jean, which just celebrated last year its 100th

anniversary, is among the top francophone postsecondary institutions outside of the province of Quebec. It offers more than 650 students a variety of very unique undergraduate and graduate programs in French, ranging from education to business to nursing to engineering and much more. The campus is also home to the University of Alberta's Canadian Studies Institute and the largest French language library collection in western Canada, a real gem.

I would ask our guests in the members' gallery to stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly as I introduce them. They are dean Marc Arnal, Mr. Denis Fontaine, associate dean responsible for recruitment, and Dr. Claude Couture, director of the Canadian Studies Institute. I would ask all members to give them a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Janet Ryan-Newell. I had the pleasure of meeting Janet last Friday at the Crossroads Family Services Foster Parent Banquet. Mrs. Ryan-Newell founded Crossroads Family Services since 1997. Crossroads is a nonprofit foster care agency. Their mandate is to recruit, train, and support high-quality foster families. Prior to this new opportunity she had worked as a child psychologist and a teacher in Edmonton for many years. I would ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Foster Parents

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are more than 2,300 foster homes in this province caring for some of our most vulnerable children during what can often be troubling or difficult times in their lives. Each and every day they demonstrate dedication, generosity, patience, compassion, and strength.

This past Friday I was truly honoured to take part in the Crossroads Family Services Foster Parent Banquet that was organized by Mrs. Janet Ryan-Newell. It was a wonderful opportunity to visit with a number of dedicated foster families. It brought me great warmth and hope to know that there are people like them who open their homes and hearts to children and youth in need.

I also had the opportunity to hear about the terrific turnout at the foster parent recruitment information session hosted by my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose. We need more families like them to help us care for young Albertans. People of many backgrounds and situations become wonderful foster parents. I encourage Albertans to visit fostercarealberta.ca to learn more about foster parenting and if it's right for their family.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Alberta foster parents. Without a doubt, your kindness, skill, and commitment are making a difference in the lives of young people and in helping to create a stronger, more vibrant Alberta.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Confederation Park Senior Citizens Centre

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about a very special place within my constituency of Calgary-North Hill,

Confederation Park Senior Citizens Centre. The centre was founded in 1973, beginning as a small group of seniors who wanted to create a place for seniors to stay connected with their community and maintain an active lifestyle. What began as meetings at St. Giles church grew to 125 members in their first year. Confederation Park Senior Citizens Centre now boasts over 900 members.

On February 25, 2009, I attended the centre's annual general meeting, where it highlighted the past year's successes and challenges and looked forward to the upcoming year. From the tea and conversation program to the camera club and fundraising events, the Confederation Park Senior Citizens Centre is an outstanding example of the kind of community that Calgary-North Hill is. The centre is even being used now by the family care centre in a pilot project for Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers.

Confederation Park seniors' centre averages 339 volunteers monthly who put in over 38,000 hours a year. The volunteers, who are the lifeblood of this facility, make me proud to be their MLA.

Mr. Speaker, just last month the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports met with myself and the president of Confederation Park seniors' centre, Claire Crierie, regarding some of the operational challenges facing the centre. We had a welcome and good discussion about how to keep such a needed resource for our seniors in our communities accessible and affordable.

I'd like to commend this facility for another amazing year in operation and wish them even more success in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Health Ethics Week

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Alberta's eighth Health Ethics Week, which took place from the 2nd to the 8th of this month.

According to the Provincial Health Ethics Network an ethical issue arises in any situation in which people face choices about how to act that will have an impact on others. Health ethics is the branch of ethics that deals with ethics issues arising in the fields of health care, medicine and biology.

Making ethical decisions within a public service context is becoming increasingly complex because of the advancement of technologies, evolving demographics and trends, and greater citizen interest in decisions that affect our lives and demand for better information to make informed decisions.

1:40

Health ethics issues are surfaced from all aspects of health services from the delivery of health care such as making decisions on end-of-life matters, to health promotion – an example would be allocating resources to preventative versus acute care – to conducting health research on matters such as gene therapy and informed consent.

Mr. Speaker, the key goals for the designated Health Ethics Week include highlighting the importance of examining values underpinning the health system, offering health ethics education, and profiling health ethics issues across the province. One of the objectives of Health Ethics Week is to engage citizens of Alberta in discussions about the meaning of respecting human dignity, promoting well-being for all, and advocating fairness.

The theme for the 2009 Health Ethics Week was Nurturing Respect and Caring in Times of Transition, which focuses on promoting respect between health care providers, patients, staff, and the public. Highlights from this year's events include lectures on subjects such as apology legislation and health care, ethics across

cultures, human dignity, and medical technology. I believe most people can appreciate the level of complexity and controversy involved in these discourses just by the titles of the events.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

North East Centre of Community Society

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to offer my sincerest congratulations to the North East Centre of Community Society for acquiring funding for their new Genesis centre in northeast Calgary. This facility will provide an 18,000 square foot library, fitness centre, large gymnasium, multipurpose meeting room, community kitchen, food and retail services, and a new high school. The entire project will cover 225,000 square feet developed in the communities of Martindale, Taradale, and Saddle Ridge.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of this building are numerous, such as immigration assistance, youth and family support services as well as employment and training assistance. It will also give young people a place to go in their spare time, and we all know that the more time spent on positive activities such as recreation and cultural pursuits, the less likely these young people are to experiment with drugs or get swept up in gang life.

The NECCS facility will also serve to break down cultural and ethnic barriers. Those seeking assistance with employment issues as well as English as a second language will be able to find support agencies here. This will also help new Canadians integrate into both the workforce and society, allowing them to participate fully in their communities to the benefit of all Calgarians.

This facility will serve as a jewel in the crown of northeast Calgary. I want to congratulate the NECCS board and their members and their partners in the community: the YMCA, the city of Calgary, the United Way of Calgary, Genesis corporation as well as all of the local community groups for their hard work and dedication. I would also like to thank the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit, who graciously offered his help when I met with him to promote this facility. I would like to thank the Premier and other hon. members who were in attendance. Without the efforts of all of these people this initiative would not have been possible. The legacy they have created will last for many generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Young Worker Safety

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in October I had the privilege of attending the launch of Alberta's young worker safety campaign called bloodylucky.ca. Along with the Minister of Employment and Immigration I had the honour of speaking with young workers at this event. I am strongly behind this web-based campaign, one that garnered significant media attention and had over 60,000 website visits in the first week alone. Now, we will never know for sure whether bloodylucky.ca can be directly credited with saving lives or limbs, but I am a firm believer that when we can encourage young Albertans to discuss workplace health and safety with their employers or they can talk about it amongst their peers, it is well worth it.

I was very pleased to hear that bloodylucky.ca has now been recognized by the Advertising Club of Edmonton. At its recent ACE awards bloodylucky.ca received the fearless client award, which is most fitting. I am told that the award is for a campaign that demonstrates a willingness to stretch boundaries and to take creative

risks in an effort to deliver effective communications. This campaign pushed the boundaries because it had to, it went beyond the usual government messaging because it had to, and it made young Alberta workers sit up and take note because they had to.

I would like to commend everyone involved in bloodylucky.ca for having the courage to move forth with this campaign, for having the passion to reach out to such a hard-to-reach audience, and for being, as the ACE awards proclaim, a fearless client.

Congratulations.

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

Agricultural Service Board Awards

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2009 agricultural service board annual supper and community services volunteer appreciation night was held this past Friday, March 6. It was hosted by Mayor Jim Rennie and the council and staff from Woodlands county. The evening started out with an official greeting by our Speaker, MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that. After a fantastic home-cooked meal the first recognition went to John and Mabel Baxter. The Baxters won the Northlands farm family award in 2008 for Woodlands county.

I would also like to mention the Golden Heart award winners for 2008: Helen Kluin and Pauline Thompson from Fort Assiniboine; Bill Jackson, Kaj Christensen, Don and Bonnie Myers of Blue Ridge; and Lorraine Yagos, Toni Meyers, and Diane Hagman from Anselmo.

This year's civic award was won by the Whitecourt Woodlands Flying Club. The club hosted an air show, with attendance of nearly 10,000, Mr. Speaker.

Our volunteers are the real movers and shakers in our communities. They make things happen and ensure that events run smoothly. Mr. Speaker, on both your behalf and mine I would like to congratulate the award winners. A big thank you to Woodlands county for treating us to a great evening at Topland hall, which is located just kilometres from the geographic centre of our province, Mr. Speaker, as you know.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Dr. Brown: In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented Thursday, March 5, 2009, and I can advise the House that the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94. Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition which reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to request the inclusion of Complex Decongestive Therapy in the list of accepted therapeutic procedures covered by Alberta Health Care.

This petition adds 246 signatures to the 335 signatures on a similar petition which was presented in 2006. The signatures were gathered by the Alberta Lymphedema Association, members of which were my guests in the House yesterday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Bill 24

Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 24, the Animal Health Amendment Act, 2009.

This new act allows Alberta to better prepare for and respond to an outbreak of a highly contagious livestock disease, and it also allows the government to respond to emergency disease situations quicker and more effectively to protect both animal and human health. The amendments to the act are being sought for minor improvements to the Animal Health Act. The proposed changes are completely aligned with the Alberta livestock and meat strategy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 24 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Bill 26

Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table Bill 26, the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2009, for first reading.

The Wildlife Act governs the management of wildlife as a Crown resource and enables the hunting and trapping of wildlife while providing protections and controls where necessary. Wildlife management is challenging and continuously changing, and these amendments will eliminate certain challenges in administering and enforcing the act. These miscellaneous amendments will clarify legislation to avoid confusion in courts and deal with offences. The amendments will also allow fish and wildlife officers to deal with offences, monitor hunting activities, respond to wildlife issues, and conduct wildlife control measures more effectively. These amendments will strengthen our wildlife management legislation to ensure the protection of our wildlife resources for current and future Albertans.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 26 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Speaker's Ruling Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we move to Oral Question Period, I just want to advise all members that I have been receiving complaints. In the recent letter that I put out to all hon. members with respect to laptop computers and other electronic devices, including BlackBerrys, I indicated they were not to be utilized

during question period. There's something going on in virtual wonderland called Twittering, and it seems that even as the question period goes on, some hon. members have been accessing their BlackBerrys to put some messages in the virtual world before the question is even answered by another person. Come on now. We agreed on certain things, certain decorum. I've even noticed today that prior to this point in time several members had BlackBerrys out. Please.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In these uncertain economic times uncertainty is dominating the markets. This uncertainty is only heightened with the Premier continuously giving different messages about the plans for Alberta and what Alberta is facing. We've heard a different message from this government on the economic plan every week. To the Premier: why isn't the Premier providing a consistent economic message to Albertans?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, we are. I've said that part of our three-point plan will be to tighten up our spending in the upcoming budget. The second will be the necessity to dip into the savings that we've managed to set aside in the bank for times like these. The third is to continue to invest in people and infrastructure in this province.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, the budget is coming down within weeks, and we've heard from this Premier at various times indicating the possibility of dramatic spending cuts, public-sector debt, then no debt, then deficits, then no deficits. To the Premier: what principles will guide our economic plan in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, our goal is to come out of this global recession stronger, meaning that we'll have to continue to invest in people and infrastructure, as I've said before. We don't want to lose the nurses, the doctors that we've attracted to the province nor all of the other people that have moved to Alberta. So that means continued investment in our programs and also in infrastructure.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Does the Premier believe he's inspiring confidence in Alberta's economic outlook by continuing to speculate about the course of this government's take on the economic downturn?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there's no speculation. The plan is very clear cut. We will tighten up our spending, as I said. However, as I said before, we will ensure that we take care of the most vulnerable Albertans. That is, you know, the history of this government, and we will continue to do so.

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

Provincial Borrowing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the Premier some simple questions around his musings about borrowing

money and putting this province back into debt. Instead of straight answers, what I got was more musings about how we maybe could get a lower interest rate on the loan than the rates we're getting on our investments. This from a government that lost 15 per cent on its investments last year, so forgive me if I'm skeptical, given the Premier's ability to buy high and sell low. I'll try again, same question as yesterday: is the Premier going to change the Fiscal Responsibility Act so he can put Alberta back into debt? Yes or no?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, even though Alberta has lost some of its savings, I will say that AIMCo has done a marvellous job. Where other jurisdictions have lost as much as 35 to 40 per cent, the overall loss to the investments we've had is about 16 per cent. So that's a pretty good performance compared to other jurisdictions. The other is that we are looking at all options in terms of ensuring that we have the necessary infrastructure in place as we come out of this recession. I don't want to put this province back in the same position we were before, where we're building infrastructure at 20, 25 per cent inflation a year and trying to catch up with that. We have an opportunity to put people to work. We have an opportunity to build infrastructure that's going to support continued quality of life in this province, and it's the best time now than ever.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has the Premier undertaken any review of his government's current spending practices, be it on capital or core programs, because you can spend stupid on both, before he started to think out loud about taking out a loan?

Mr. Stelmach: Yes, I have. In fact, with respect to our operational side of the budget – the operational side of the budget, Mr. Speaker, is what we pay for on a daily basis, whether it be surgeries in hospitals, educating our children – that part of the budget will be balanced; however, on infrastructure we may be looking at alternative ways of financing that infrastructure because concrete is about half of what it was before in price and steel has dropped dramatically.

You know, it's funny. I know that yesterday the hon. member expressed real anger. He was kind of agitated, and I can see why. If you're sitting on the fence all that time, it's kind of hard to take that. But here's the thing. It wasn't that long ago when the opposition planned to spend the entire sustainability budget before the last election on new boondoggles in the province of Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here's the real question. How did we go – how did we go – from 15 years of surpluses in this province to six months after the economy goes south on us, this government has to talk about borrowing money?

Mr. Stelmach: That's the point that the hon. member is missing. As I said yesterday, there is no jurisdiction that has \$14 billion in cash in the bank to help offset the difficulties as we're working through this global recession: \$6 billion of that is for capital, and \$7.7 billion is for supporting the programs that Albertans enjoy – again, that's in health and education, social services, children's services – ensuring that we maintain quality of life as we move through this very difficult economic period.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Farm Worker Safety

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government has laws to protect the welfare of pigs and cattle and chickens and sheep and other livestock. The law covers abuse and illness, food, water, ventilation, and transportation, and it provides for inspection, enforcement, and penalties. This same government deliberately exempts paid farm workers from WCB, occupational health and safety, and the labour code. To the Premier: why does this government protect farm animals but not paid farm workers?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, it's the same question that was raised by the member a few months ago. I said yesterday that both ministers are looking at consulting with various farm organizations, trying to bring about legislation or policy that's going to make sense in terms of the operation of our farms in the province, and I'm awaiting the results of that consultation. It will come back here to the House, and we'll have a chance to further debate it.

Dr. Taft: Well, it's taking too long, Mr. Speaker. This Premier when he was minister of agriculture strengthened the protection for livestock and said, and I quote: in Alberta we must show the public by our actions that the humane treatment of the livestock in our care is a priority, and we want to have a system that places Alberta in a leadership position world-wide with regards to the humane treatment of farm animals. This same government explicitly exempts paid farm workers from basic protection. Again to the Premier: why doesn't this government give all human beings the same rights?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the two ministers are meeting with farm organizations and others to discuss options with respect to this issue and will bring the consultations back to the Legislature.

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, it's taking too long. This Premier was minister of agriculture 10 years ago when he brought in the Alberta livestock protection system. He could also have brought in legislation to protect farm workers. He refused. In the years since he became agriculture minister, 223 people have died in farm accidents and there have been over 15,000 significant injuries. To the Premier: will he act now to bring in equivalent protection for paid farm workers as is provided for farm animals?

2:00

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Riverview made quite a serious allegation in this House. What he said was, of course, wrong because in the years that I've served in this House as a member of this government and also the government that I now lead in Alberta, there has been no connection between support of the political process and my government's decision on public policy. I've always made it clear that I govern for all Albertans and that donors cannot expect any special treatment.

I also had a meeting with the hon. Leader of the Opposition before this session was convened, and we reached an agreement during that meeting that we were going to maintain decorum in the House. I expect the Leader of the Official Opposition to maintain the agreement that we reached a few weeks ago. I just hope that all sides of the House will be respectful of this agreement that we reached, and I wish the hon. leader success in obtaining that agreement.

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

Assembly of Land for Large Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in question period the Premier claimed that future power supplies to Edmonton and Calgary depended on giving the government almost unlimited and unchecked control over privately owned land. Previous Alberta governments have managed economic growth quite well without resorting to such draconian measures. The question is to the Premier. Why can't this government manage growth and development without taking away the rights of Alberta landowners? What's wrong with this government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the preamble was, but he's totally wrong. I've made a comment that as we look to the future in this province and as we have more people moving in, we have the need to supply more electricity to the larger urban centres, which we know is definitely necessary. We want to ensure that all landowners in Alberta are treated fairly and that there is a fair process. That's the objective, of course, of the bill. I am going to work very hard together with our cabinet and caucus to ensure that all landowners, no matter where they live in the province of Alberta, are represented fairly and treated fairly and that there's a very fair process as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Landowners should not be subject to unchecked government control of their land, even more so when this control can exist for an unlimited period of time and without compensation. My question is to the Premier. Why is it the policy of this government to sterilize the land of Albertans without time limits and without compensation?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, that's exactly the issue that I raised yesterday. That's what we want to avoid. There were landowners that in prior years, the last 35 to 40 years, have had to resort to the courts to settle some of their differences. We want to make sure that landowners are protected in legislation as opposed to how we purchase land, perhaps, in the future for long-term corridors. That's why I'm looking forward to a good discussion of this matter because this is the time to put that legislation in place that will help carry this province forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, this legislation will take away those rights to access the courts by giving the government almost unlimited power. Just one year after the election this government is already out of touch with Albertans. Giving the government the power to control the land of private citizens without due process flies in the face of Albertans' traditions and principles. My question is to the Premier. Will you admit that it's wrong to give the government almost unlimited power over private land, including two-year jail time for those who refuse to comply, and do the right thing and withdraw Bill 19?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this is all about fairness and a process that's clearly laid out in legislation so that landowners are treated fairly in the province. What I will say is that yesterday the hon. leader was giving me a lesson, I think, through his preamble on how not to approach rural Albertans for support. I say that you should be the last person I would be consulting to see how to win more seats in this province of Alberta.

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

Landowner Compensation for Government-acquired Land

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have recently received a number of calls and e-mails from constituents regarding compensation for landowners when government identifies the need to acquire land. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure. What policy is currently in place regarding landowner compensation when government acquires land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our policy, of course, is to pay fair market value, with negotiation being the preferred method that we use to determine the selling price. We obtain an independent appraisal before negotiations begin, and we suggest that landowners do the same. These appraisals form the basis of our negotiations.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you. To the same minister: at what point during the process of identifying the need for land does the landowner have the opportunity to sell the land for fair market value?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, it's in our best interests to buy the necessary land as quickly as possible. When we approve a project that requires land, we must prepare to buy that land in a timely fashion. If a landowner is ready to sell us the land, we're very happy to start negotiations right away.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: is the government going to ensure that these principles are considered in future legislation that involves acquiring land for large projects that benefit Albertans?

Mr. Hayden: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Our policy is to compensate landowners fairly and to pay fair market value. That policy will continue. Once a project area has been designated by government, we'll begin buying that land, and priority will be given to the landowners who want to sell their property as soon as possible. That will be covered in all of our actions forward.

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

Assembly of Land for Large Infrastructure Projects

(continued)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a government that has consistently failed to manage its relationship with private landowners. Bill 19 is about this government's latest attempt to acquire property necessary for utility corridors, pipelines, and roads. This latest government policy is a direct result of the bungled spying incident in Rimbey in the summer of 2007. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Given the government's history of tolerance toward the EUB practice of hiring spies to watch over landowners, how is this bill now going to do anything other than inflame the very groups of landowners that were spied on in the first place in Rimbey in 2007?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I disagree with many things that have been said there. I think it's important to note that the new legislation that is being brought forward and that we anticipate will pass is being put in place to give us a more open and transparent process than we've had in the past. It will ensure that landowners and those that are affected will be spoken with, will be in on the conversations of our requirements far before we ever move towards acquiring that land so that we get the opinions of those most affected and they get an opportunity for meaningful input.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: if this government was open and transparent, why did the government fail in this case to consult with the very groups that were spied on in Rimbey before they drafted this policy?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, it's in the best interests of Albertans that their government move forward, improve their legislation, and make a more open and transparent government and a more open and transparent process that takes into consideration their needs and their wishes. That's what we do. That's what we're doing. That's what we'll continue to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. This policy proposal is extremely controversial, and many Alberta landowners want to raise their concerns and propose changes. If you're open and transparent, should we not refer it now to this Assembly's all-party Standing Committee on the Economy so that we can have true public consultation even before it's debated here in the Legislative Assembly?

2:10

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, legislation travels through the system in the way that is designated by that system. We ensure that we speak to the people that are affected and the people that can give us the proper input. Then we're going to enjoy a wonderful debate in this House that is going to show Albertans that what is being brought forward is in the best interests of Albertans, all Albertans, especially those who are the landowners, who need to be treated fairly and compensated properly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Online Exploitation of Children

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was recently reported that 1 in 50 Canadians access child pornography on the Internet, a shocking and disturbing figure. Child pornography is a multibillion-dollar industry and one of the fastest growing criminal segments on the Internet. We must ensure that our children are safe from online predators who use the Internet to anonymously fulfill their twisted fantasies. My questions are all to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Mr. Minister, what are you doing to ensure that here in Alberta we can track down and find those who try to sexually exploit our children using the Internet?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question. I can tell the hon. member that this government funds an integrated police unit

whose sole purpose is to track down and arrest online predators. The 22-member integrated child exploitation unit is made up of investigators from the RCMP and Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, and Lethbridge regional police services. These dedicated men and women work closely with local, national, and international police and law enforcement agencies to investigate complaints that range from the making and distribution of child pornography to the luring of children on the Internet.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What evidence does the minister have that will assure this House and all Albertans that the integrated child exploitation unit is making a difference?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, our integrated child exploitation unit investigates complaints anywhere in this province. Since the unit was established in 2006, ICE members have investigated over a thousand complaints, and they've laid over 500 charges here in Alberta. The ICE unit members have also been involved in a number of high-profile international cases that have resulted in the dismantling of child pornography rings and the apprehension of children who were being sexually exploited.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard police say that you can't arrest your way out of this problem. What else is the ICE unit doing to combat online child exploitation?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, finding and arresting those who try to exploit our children is the ICE unit's mandate, but the unit also serves another very important function. ICE investigators have made presentations to school and community groups to raise awareness about the potential dangers of lurking online. As the hon. member has mentioned, we might not be able to arrest our way out of this problem, but we can provide our children and parents with information that will protect them from Internet predators.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Ambulance Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's March 10, and the minister of health has only three weeks to clear any confusion regarding the transfer of ground ambulance authority to the province. There have been many concerns raised about the province's ability to properly plan and execute the ambulance transfer by the April 1 deadline. To the minister: has the province signed contracts with all the ambulance providers in Alberta?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat what I said I think last Thursday to the Member for Lethbridge-West. We have now concluded all 65 contracts with municipalities in this province. At that time – and I haven't had an update since – there were some loose ends to tie up with a small provider, but in essence everything is a go on track for April 1. Unlike the comments of the Leader of the Official Opposition, it is a smooth transition that is happening, with everybody co-operating, and I see no reason that it shouldn't proceed as planned.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: how many municipalities will continue providing ambulance services after the April 1 date?

Mr. Liepert: Again I have to go from memory because I was prepared for the question last Thursday, but I wasn't today. My recollection is that I think 12 are going to be direct-delivered by Alberta Health Services, and the remainder are integrated services, but I'd have to get the numbers, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. Again to the minister: does the province have the funds necessary this time to make the transition?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the dollars for this transition are in the current budget that we're in, the current year. The member was here when we passed the budget last spring, and I would ask him to take a look at the budget documents. They're clearly laid out in this year's budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Amber Alert Program

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent abduction of the young lady from Penhold has raised Albertans' awareness of as well as concerns with the Amber Alert program. My question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. In light of some of the perceived problems that have arisen from this case, is the minister considering any changes to the Amber Alert program to make it even better?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, let me first say that we're all relieved and grateful that this incident ended with the return of the child and also the arrest of the perpetrator. Alberta's Amber Alert program has proven highly successful in helping police find abducted children because it quickly mobilizes the eyes and ears of the community. All nine Amber Alerts issued since this program started in 2002 have resulted in the safe return of the children. We have no plans to change this very effective program.

Mr. Marz: To make it better, would the minister consider allowing the RCMP to use their own discretion to trigger an Amber Alert within the first 24 hours of receiving a report of a missing person?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, to supplement a number of other investigative procedures, the police use the Amber Alert as a tool of last resort to find missing children. The Amber Alert program is effective because police throughout Alberta apply four consistent criteria when deciding whether or not it needs to be activated. Those criteria include whether or not there is clear evidence of an abduction; that police believe the child to be at risk of physical harm or death; that there is sufficient information to allow the public to identify the child, the abductor, and the mode of transportation; that the Amber Alert can be issued quickly enough for a reasonable expectation of success. It is critical that all police in Alberta apply the same criteria consistently for the Amber Alert program to continue being effective.

Mr. Marz: Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: would the minister consider implementing an Amber Alert based on the

description of the victim only instead of waiting for a description of the perpetrator and their vehicle?

Mr. Lindsay: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, the success of this program is based on the four criteria that I described. That being said, the police use other methods, such as in the case recently in Red Deer, where they do get on the airwaves and in the newspapers and on TV with the description of the person who's missing to ensure that we can find them as soon as possible.

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

Education Achievement Testing

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fraser Institute recently released their rankings of Alberta schools based on the province's achievement test scores. Commenting on the ranking, the Minister of Education stated, and I quote: in my view, it is a totally inappropriate way to measure whether you have a good school or good teaching. To the Minister of Education: if the minister is opposed to ranking schools based on their test scores, why does the minister release the results for publication each year under the pretense of accountability?

Mr. Hancock: Every year, as I understand it, we receive a FOIP request, a freedom of information and protection of privacy request, under the act. Under the act, unless we meet one of the exemptions to withhold information, we're required to make information available to the public.

Mr. Chase: This government uses FOIP very much to their advantage. Usually it's a cloak.

Given that the minister himself questions the validity of using the test scores to rank schools and teaching, in what way does publishing the scores hold schools and teachers accountable or improve student results?

Mr. Hancock: First of all, it should be clear that we neither rank the schools, nor do we publish those results. We provide the results to the school boards for their use in doing assessments and for improvement of their system's approach to the delivery of education in the province. They're part of our accountability pillar. We do not publish the results, but we follow the law, and the law requires that information that does not impinge on a contractual obligation or release personal information is made public. That's the law of the province of Alberta. I have to admit that I've asked whether we can amend that law so that these results not be released, but that's the law as it stands, and we comply.

Mr. Chase: Interestingly, First Nations children's test results aren't revealed because they already know what the results will be. These are tests of economy as opposed to education.

The minister seems to acknowledge that there are other, more effective ways to hold schools accountable than provincial achievement tests. Does the minister also acknowledge that the \$5 million spent on questionable testing at the grade 3 level alone is not good value for that money?

2:20

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, with respect to FNMI results I would make this clear: one of the things we don't have to do under the freedom of information and protection of privacy rule is release any information which could be harmful or detrimental to an identifiable

group of people. Because there are minimal results or much fewer results in the FNMI population, we can use that exemption, and we do creatively use that exemption to not release information where we don't think it should be released and where we can stop the release. So that would be the answer to the preamble.

With respect to the costs the hon. member has them wrong. It's about \$540,000, if I remember correctly, for the administration of the PAT 3 tests. The \$5 million is more like the budget for the administration of all of the provincial achievement tests.

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

Foster Care

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the minister for children and youth refused to answer my question about the number of overcrowded foster homes in Alberta. Instead, she began damage control, announcing a status update of unfinished recommendations she'd promised to implement last June. Everyday Albertans don't need more promises or updates; they need the minister to tell us the answer to a very simple, very important question. To the minister: how many Alberta foster homes currently exceed the four-child maximum?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the exact number, but I can tell you that in this province we have a ratio of two foster children per foster home, and that is either the lowest in the country or one of the lowest rates, so I do know that the percentage of anyone with more than four children has to be awfully small. I can also tell you that if we have more than four children in a foster home, it means that they have been licensed to do so, so I would not call that overloading. That means that the training is there, that the supports are there. I just think it's very important to make that point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, last year your recommendations were that you needed to change that process because the licensing wasn't good enough. Common sense tells us that children in overcrowded foster homes are at greater risk of suffering injury or death. You told us you'd take action to reduce that. Nine months later it hasn't been done. To the minister: in the nine months since you made but did not implement your initial promise, how many more foster homes were allowed to exceed the four-child maximum?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, this member yesterday tabled an article that was in the paper last June. The foster care report had just been released. I automatically accepted all eight recommendations and said that we would immediately start implementing, which is in this article. The article also pointed out that it praised the province's system overall and said that it was envied by foster parents across the country. I think, again, we have to realize that we started implementing the eight recommendations, but what that entailed over the last several months is taking a look at options, taking a look at best practices, developing the policy, creating working committees, going out there and consulting, and then training staff. What I tabled yesterday shows that many of the eight recommendations are complete or close to being complete, so it's quite remarkable what has been accomplished.

Ms Notley: Those recommendations came a year and a half after the death that first prompted them, so I don't think that you should give yourself too much of a pat on the back.

The news about the most recent tragedy in foster care did not come through the minister. The news about the delay in your implementations only came as part of a damage control exercise. To the minister: what will it take to convince you that a co-chair that you call independent is not enough and that we need a fully independent, transparent public inquiry into Alberta's foster care system?

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I was not giving myself a pat; I was congratulating the thousands of very dedicated individuals in this province that we have working on behalf of our children.

Yesterday I also made it very clear, when we were talking about this tragedy, that I would not be irresponsible, that I would not get into speculating, and I would not interfere with the work of the police. I can also tell the House that I called the special case review last week, and it was yesterday that I came out with the news that we would make the findings public and also involve some external expertise. Again, to make things clear, it was not because of this member.

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

Postsecondary Education Affordability

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I've had a number of conversations with concerned constituents with regard to postsecondary education. I know that Albertans and specifically Albertan parents and students are well aware of the benefits of being able to save for education after grade 12. My first question, therefore, is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. During these economic times, that are quite difficult and daunting for many, what is the minister doing to ensure that middle and lower income Albertans can save for their children's postsecondary education?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of programs that can help Albertans realize postsecondary education. It's a very high priority for this government. This past year, as an example, we expanded the Rutherford scholarships to include those high school students who recorded averages between 75 and 80 per cent. It used to be above 80 per cent. There are numerous nonrepayable provincial government grants and bursaries available for students who demonstrate financial need, and a lot of our programs are targeted to those students or those adults who have a financial need. Our Alberta student loan program is one of the finest in the country, and our scholarship and bursary program is probably the largest in the country.

Mr. Rodney: My second question is to the same minister. That will answer some of the constituent questions but not others. In light of the downturn of the economy I wonder if the minister can ensure that the Alberta incentive programs for postsecondary savings such as the Alberta centennial education savings program will continue to support Albertan students.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point the ACES

program remains consistent with past years of the program. Awareness and access are both on the upswing. I would admit that in the initial years of the program awareness by parents wasn't really all that high. At present 53 credit unions, scholarship foundations, and other financial service providers are processing ACES applications, and that's a fourfold increase since 2005. So, as I said, awareness is coming up. One of the greatest investments that any Albertan can make is in a postsecondary education, and our government works to ensure that that dream is possible for every Albertan.

Mr. Rodney: My final question is to the same minister, and it has to do with student loans and applying for them. Parents are often required, of course, to fund a wide range of costs to help children through postsecondary education regardless of these aforementioned affordability programs that are available. I'm wondering and my constituents need to know: are there plans to further reduce the financial commitments required by parents when students are applying for student loans?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, as part of the affordability framework two years ago the government of Alberta and the federal government made significant investments to reduce those parental contributions. At present parental contribution is required from, really, a very small proportion of students who require financial aid. In 2007-08 only about 5 per cent of funded students in Alberta were required to have a parental contribution. That's only about 2,400 students. Forty per cent of those parental contributions were less than a thousand dollars. Within the Alberta student financial assistance program we do have an appeal mechanism if students need to appeal that process, but we're working to make it better.

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

Provincial Wetland Policy

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2005 Alberta formed the Wetland Policy Project Team to develop a provincial wetland strategy. Well, here we are four years later and still waiting for the government to deliver on a promise made to Albertans in the original water for life strategy. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Thousands of hectares of wetlands continue to be destroyed in the absence of any policy. Can the minister tell us just how long we will have to wait for the government to come through on this?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct that this process of development of a wetlands policy has been the subject of much discussion over a considerable period of time, but the answer to her question is a difficult one to give simply because this is such a critical issue. This is a very complicated issue. There are a number of considerations that have to be taken into account. I am in receipt of a report from the Water Council, and we're giving it due consideration, and I'll be coming forward very briefly.

2:30

Ms Blakeman: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that over 90 per cent of the respondents in the wetland policy workshops overwhelmingly supported maintaining and even increasing wetland area and function in Alberta, will the government policy reflect this desire for even increasing wetland area and function?

Mr. Renner: I'm not going to get into a situation where I'm now speculating on what decisions are or are not going to be made by my

colleagues. I know what recommendations I'm prepared to take forward. There is a process that needs to be dealt with through the regular channels of policy adoption within government, within cabinet and caucus, and until all of that process is completed, it would be, I think, irresponsible on my part to try and predict what the outcomes are going to be.

Ms Blakeman: With due respect, we need you to hustle up on that one.

To the same minister: given that there will be a cost to maintaining wetlands in Alberta and most evidently in the oil sands region, will the government require industry to bear these costs as part of doing business, or will the taxpayers be on the hook for some of these costs, as has already happened with the reclaiming of orphan wells?

Mr. Renner: Well, the analogy is totally inappropriate and doesn't apply at all. Clearly, we have an interim policy that's been in place with respect to wetlands, and it's been applied primarily in southern Alberta. The costs of that policy are directly borne by the developers. I don't see any reason why an extension of a wetlands policy across the province would be dealt with in any other way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Rural-to-urban Transition of Aboriginal People

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many aboriginal people living in my constituency, and more are moving there every day. Transition and the ability to adapt is a very important issue for aboriginals coming off reserve or off settlement to live, learn, or work in urban centres. Oftentimes many aboriginals and, in particular, aboriginal youth encounter various barriers to a smooth transition into urban life. My questions are for the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. What is your ministry doing to help aboriginals address and overcome potential transition barriers such as isolation, housing, and other support services?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we provide about \$0.3 million annually to urban centres such as Edmonton and Calgary for our urban aboriginal strategy. We provide an additional \$0.7 million toward about 20 friendship centres across the province, where transitioning aboriginals frequently come for help with job training, life skills, upgrading, access to health and employment and recreational and cultural programming. Those programs are having quite a positive effect to date.

Mr. Vandermeer: What processes, checks, and balances do you have in place to measure the effectiveness of these urban help and self-help initiatives?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question because at the heart of all of our government programs is accountability. Specific to the question in terms of aboriginal relations we require audited financial statements for these grants that are going out. We require activity reports. This year we're adding a stricter requirement for performance measure reporting, which will help us fill any voids or loopholes that might exist, to help improve those programs for the transitioning people being asked about.

Mr. Vandermeer: Given that Alberta's aboriginal population is already the third largest in Canada and continues to grow rapidly, what are your plans to address the additional impact of aboriginals in transition?

Mr. Zwozdesky: In brief, Mr. Speaker, my ministry is working very aggressively with municipalities across the province – that includes many urban centres, obviously – with aboriginal organizations, aboriginal communities, and indeed with the federal government to ensure that the programs we are currently designing and those that will be designed going into the out-years will have the maximum benefit for aboriginals in transition. We're also working very aggressively with other ministries on cross-ministry initiatives – for example, with Housing and Urban Affairs, with Children and Youth Services, certainly with Employment and Immigration, and, of course, with Advanced Education and Technology – to help design the best programs possible.

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

Asset-backed Commercial Paper

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January it was reported that Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Ottawa had agreed to provide 3 and a half billion dollars' worth of loans to restructure frozen asset-backed commercial papers, yet this commitment came before the finance minister announced that this year's surplus is gone and that Alberta is going to run a deficit. To the minister of finance: how much of this \$3.5 billion will come from Alberta, and where exactly will this money come from?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This money is, in fact, a backstopping of another backstopping already being provided by the investors in the asset-backed commercial paper. It was a request that was made by the Alberta Treasury Branches on behalf of the investors in Alberta. Throughout Canada, with Quebec mostly affected, Alberta in part, Ontario in part, we believe that a partnership with the federal government would assure that the overseas funders that were primarily responsible for the loans would get confidence that we were not going to leave those loans out for dissolving.

Mr. Taylor: That was an interesting answer but not to the question I asked. I'll ask it again. How much of this \$3.5 billion will come from Alberta, and where exactly within that context will it come from?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a paper support for roughly \$300 million, but it is, in fact, not something that is actually going to be spent provided that all of the bridges that are already in place are protected as we believe them to be. It is a support for the already in place backstopping being provided by the banks and the investors. It's just one additional piece of surety that we were able to provide the investors overseas. It is not something that is actually cash being put on the line today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Alberta government originally resisted this restructuring plan given that it had

already provided ATB with \$550 million in additional collateral for its exposure to the asset-backed commercial papers, what made the government change its mind?

Ms Evans: I think, Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question because you wonder how we were thinking when we met as ministers at a finance meeting with Minister Flaherty. What we were thinking of was the Canadians that made investments. We were thinking about the people that had put their life savings on the line, the fact that we had confidence in the banks that were going to restructure this type of management in the asset-backed commercial paper. It was a show of confidence that our institutions would manage well. Here in Alberta we had universities, credit unions, and ATB all as investors accessing these funds, and we said that we're confident. Much more contribution was made by Quebec and obviously the federal government as well.

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

Charter Schools

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1995 as a strategy to improve education, the Alberta government introduced charter schools. Each of these schools, of which there are 12 in Alberta, has a unique charter mandate providing innovation and choice to parents in our education system, but because of the charter terms these schools have no guarantee that their charter will be renewed when their five years are up. To the Minister of Education: I know the minister recognizes the value of charter schools, so when will he grant them permanency?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have indicated to charter schools in meetings with their organization that we do appreciate the role and function of charter schools in the public education system, and we do appreciate the fact that they were set up to push the education system to explore new or alternative approaches to teaching and learning. That being said, what we need to do in order to move to the stage where they have permanent charters rather than renewable charters is to find a way to make sure that that innovation, that standard is continued. It is of absolutely no value to have just another school board; they have to be able to continue in their role and function.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The operation of charter schools is additionally complicated by the insufficiency of their facilities. Specifically, these schools cannot purchase facilities because they have no access to capital funding due to their charter status. Rather, they must lease their school campus. To the same minister: what are you doing to alleviate these financial barriers so that charter schools can create long-term visions and operate without the burden of a facility lease?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, indeed, that is one of the primary purposes why we would try and move to a permanent charter, if we can accomplish that and still maintain the purpose for which they've been established. In the meantime we work very closely with the charter schools to make sure that if there are other public school facilities available, they can be made available on a timely basis to

charter schools, and we'll continue to do that. We want to work to a permanency for charter schools that are working well but in a manner which ensures that they continue to push the edges of knowledge and edges of education and keep new, exciting ideas for education alive.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By supporting students whose second or even third language is English, the Almadina charter school academy in my constituency contributes significantly to the quality of education in Alberta. This school has a student population that is capped by the Minister of Education at 600. To the same minister: will you consider raising this cap so as to provide more students with the unique opportunities that this school offers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an area that's very important as an intersection between where the charter schools operate and where the public schools operate, and we have a dialogue on education in which we're discussing those very issues of how we do education in the future of the province. Charter schools can be assured that their role will not go away – charter schools are still very important to the education system – so the Inspiring Education dialogue is not about that. But the purpose for sizes and caps on charter schools initially was because you needed a cohort of students necessary to be able to prove the concept that the charter school was engaged in. That's a discussion which needs to be had with public schools, with the public, and with others as we go forward in education in this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 96 questions and responses today.

Statements by the Speaker

Visit by Speaker of the House of Commons Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker: Hon. members, several days ago I conveyed a message to the three House leaders advising that on Monday next Mr. Peter Milliken, the Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons, will be visiting Alberta and, further, that next Tuesday morning I'm going to provide an opportunity for members of the Assembly who wish to meet with Mr. Milliken in a consultation process. The memo has gone out to everybody today advising them of this opportunity next Tuesday morning.

Next Monday I would like to invite Mr. Milliken, the Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons, to join in our procession and to sit at the clerks' table. To have a stranger upon the floor of the Assembly requires that the Speaker seeks consent of the members, so I need unanimous consent because it's not part of our rules. Would anybody object to my request? If so, please say no. I think I didn't hear anything, so thank you very, very much.

I do have to convey another item. Contrary to my admonition prior to the question period today about the use of electronic devices and BlackBerrys during Oral Question Period, six of you were observed to have been utilizing these devices. Now, we have whips in each of the caucuses. Please, I've bent over backwards to try and assist in this. I don't want to get complaints from members. If we're going to have whips and they're going to be on the payroll, let's deal with this, or else I'm going to have to deal with this in an

entirely different way, which would be to the regression of all remaining members.

In 30 seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table the requisite number of copies of the Confederation Park seniors' centre 2008 annual report, that I made reference to in my member's statement today.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a document provided to me by the National Farmers Union, and it is titled *The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Toward a New Analysis and New Solutions*.

The second tabling I have is with permission from Mr. Ervin Eccleston of 2511 109th Street here in Edmonton, and it is a letter from last fall that he wrote to the hon. Premier regarding his ongoing issues with WCB.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of 10 reports from long-term care workers indicating specific problems on shifts that were short staffed. These indicate the difficulty of taking care of residents who wander and are in danger of falling and keeping up with each resident's schedule of care when there are not enough staff to go around.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Interim Supply Estimates 2009-10 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Albertans are suffering whiplash based on this government's economic policy. They cannot figure out the direction this government is going when it comes to protecting their assets, and it's very important that we spell that correctly. This government has in its predecessors Ralph Klein, who openly admitted that he didn't have a plan, and as a result we no longer see Ralph Klein in politics. But we have a Premier who makes up the plan on the spot and leaves individuals wondering, reeling, as to what the long-term plan is.

In September in Public Accounts, for example, when we were talking about ATB, the Alberta Treasury Branches, there was this overwhelming feeling being given out that Alberta was somehow insulated from the realities of the global recession. Yet with each

intervening month and lately, never mind on a weekly basis, it's become on a daily basis the Premier changes his tune. We've gone from "No, we can't run a deficit" to "Yes, we can run a creative deficit."

Now, I don't know where the Premier is getting his financial information from, although I do admit I have much greater faith in the head of AIMCo than I have in the government's own ability to manage. But when the Premier speculated this past weekend that somehow he could get a really good deal on borrowing money and save any kind of expenditures from, I'm assuming, the sustainability fund or the capital fund and when he talks about running technical deficits, it becomes a real concern.

It's been pointed out in this House by a number of individuals from both the Liberal opposition and from the NDP that this government is currently spending 23 per cent per capita beyond what other governments are spending. There doesn't seem to be any long-term thought as to when we will pay the bills that we're building up nor how we'll be able to pay the bills. This government is racking up billions of dollars, for example, in P3s. The rationale behind these P3s is that we get to keep the money now, and we only have to let it out a little at a time, and be assured, Albertans, you'll be able to sleep tonight knowing that we're in charge, that at some point in the future, as we have to pay these bills, we'll still have the money to pay them.

2:50

Now, in terms of saving versus spending and lending versus spending the money we currently have, we've taken a 2 and a half billion dollar hit this year alone, this past fiscal year ending April 1, on the heritage trust fund. I don't know the average interest rate percentage that we have on our other funds, but on the Premier's comment that we can make better money saving our current money invested in the sustainability fund, in the capital fund, if any of that money is invested in the way the money invested in the heritage trust fund has been affected, then I think he's totally out to lunch on his economic calculations. This is a great concern.

Another concern that I have is the fact that the Auditor General, our financial watchdog, has had his own spending limited. He's had to either defer or cancel 27 out of 80 projects, or 34 per cent of his projects. Now, this government is very selective at listening to what the Auditor General has to say, but further limiting his budget so that he is not able to investigate constitutes a cover-up. It's one thing to not follow through or implement his recommendations; it's another thing to not allow the Auditor General to have the opportunity to make the recommendations.

Those recommendations face a number of areas and concerns. For example, in Children and Youth Services he's not going to be able to look at financial support for children with disabilities, look at the systems, until 2010. When it comes to monitoring daycare and day home services, protecting children, that's deferred until some unknown time. We don't even have a date for that. When it comes to deferred follow-ups on education, improving school performance, what could be more important than validating the way in which we measure school performance? Yet that's been deferred until goodness knows when. School board budgeting. Just yesterday an hon. member introduced the idea of having municipal oversight. This government is great at looking at everybody's records except their own. That's why the Auditor General's business is so absolutely important. Another area that we won't be able to look at – fortunately, it's one of the more recent deferrals. At least by October 2009 the Auditor General will report back to us on P3s. I look forward to that latest update.

When the Auditor General did report, for example, on royalties, his concerns that we hadn't for a number of years been collecting

what was due were not only basically ignored, but the government, in order to, as much as anything else, discredit Fred Dunn's findings, brought in a former Auditor General, Valentine. Interestingly enough, a number of the recommendations that Valentine made paralleled those that were made by our own currently employed, hopefully for some time into the far future, Auditor General.

The government was criticized in the Auditor General's report for the way in which it collected the royalty information. At the time the Auditor General did his report, there was one person in the department controlling the flow chart information from which the royalties were assessed, and that one individual was basically just doing a sampling. He wasn't looking at each of the various companies flows upon which our royalties are judged. So I'm extremely concerned that the Auditor General is being limited in his oversight role.

The Premier at one point blames the global recession, and then the next day he comes up with his latest creative idea. He must sleep well because he certainly has interesting dreams, that are revealed in newspapers and on radio. He goes from deficit to dream to borrowing to P3s. There must be an awful lot of tossing and turning, talking about wrestling with angels, each night. We're left as Albertans wondering, for example: are the P3 school projects going to come in on time? It has taken a year and a half for them to even get to the point where the bids were made and the shovels started to get into the ground. We were told that because of the delays in building the southeast hospital . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired]

I'll look forward to continuing.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Interesting amounts of money that are being asked for in the interim supply. Again, I guess, probably the mantra from this side of the House is that if you'd budgeted properly in the first place, we wouldn't need all these extra dollars. If I ran my budget like this – unfortunately, I don't have a sugar daddy called the taxpayer to look after me, so I have to make sure that I do it right the first time.

There are some interesting questions out of Agriculture and Rural Development. I just read I think today in the paper or yesterday that, very unfortunately, more and more of our farmers are having to work off of the land to be able to make a living. I personally am very dismayed with that. I just think that it's a crime that we're losing our rural communities and that we can't in some fashion be able to help our small farmers. In fact, I think it was the federal minister of agriculture who said that he's a third-generation farmer and doesn't think that his son will be able to farm. I think that's a crime. I think it's very sad, when we do have probably some of the most arable land and excellent soil in the world, and unfortunately a lot of it, even just around the Edmonton area, is going under cement.

Questions out of Agriculture and Rural Development. The money that they're asking for is \$190,200,000. Exactly what is that going for? Will that be creating funds? My questions would be: is some of that extra money going to rural development projects and if those projects would include the field staff that they have or have not increased? From some of the people that I speak to, I think they would be pleased to have the agricultural field staff numbers increased because a lot of it is expert resources for the farmers to go to not only for field questions, but also it can take them through how to set up books and other advice that they can give them that would actually keep our farmers on the fields, where they want to be and, certainly, where I think they should be.

3:00

The other is: how much of it is going to the AFSC, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, and if the money is going to that, what programs is it going towards, and how much of that money would actually go towards the insurance programs? I know that, certainly, there were huge payouts last year for the crop damage. It was an unusual year in terms of hail damage. What would be the breakdown for these monies that would be going to the livestock and meat agencies, and how much? I know that there's been, again back to the field staff, helping and working with the farmers to make sure that they can age verify their cattle. I know that it's had a tremendous amount of push-back, but I think, unfortunately, the bottom line is that if we want to compete in a global market – and I'm sure that we do – then our cattle have to be age verified whether we like it or not. We need our field staff to help set up the monitoring systems to make it as cheap and as efficient as possible.

The other question might be: how much of the funding would be going towards the renewal process for the farm fuel program? I know that that's had quite an overhaul, and they've cut back on the number of people that are actually allowed to use purple gas, so to speak. That's another thing that would have to be overhauled.

I'm not really sure that it's clear where all of these dollars are going to go. My colleague from Calgary-Varsity has referred to the fact that the Auditor General, I believe, is not going to get nearly the amount of money that he asked for, that clearly he needs because he's had to put a number of audits on hold. In the Agricultural and Rural Development department he's had to put the ARD systems on a follow-up, food safety is deferred until October '09, and certainly the grant management program is a follow-up in October '09. I know that that doesn't sound – at least it hasn't been cancelled.

Food safety, in my mind, is something that we shouldn't be playing with. I know, for one, that I wouldn't go to the grocery store and not read the label to see where it comes from, and there are certainly certain countries that I would never buy products from. It's not so much that I think that I don't, perhaps, trust those countries; my trust at this point in time should be in the federal government. But I think that as a province we also have an obligation to make sure that the foodstuffs that are coming into this country are safe for us to eat.

I think we have to look at the way we label things that come into this country. Just because it says that it's a product of Canada doesn't mean to say that, in fact, it is. Bits and pieces can come from other places. I don't have to go through the litany of some of the tainted food that has got into this country and, quite frankly, made a lot of people sick. The fact that we are not giving the Auditor General the money that he needs to follow through on food safety I just don't think is the proper thing to do.

I don't know where answers to these questions would come from – of course, the agricultural minister isn't here – but I think these are things that I would like on the record. Before we can say to you, "Yes, I'm going to give you \$190,200,000," I really think that we should have at least some kind of an idea of where these dollars are going to be spent. Clearly, it's new money coming from somewhere. Again, my question is: why is this money necessary if the budgeting was done properly the first time? There may well be a very plausible explanation for it. Things do happen within a 12-month period, but I think that the people of Alberta should know, if this kind of money is going out, where it is going and why.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: In fairness to the hon. member, this is not extra money going out. This is to run the total ag department until the budget is passed. We dealt with and do have supplementary supply

estimates that are for expenditures that occur throughout the year after the budget.

In some of the statements you make, you've questioned: where is this money going or why this extra money? This particular interim supply amount is a consistent amount for all departments to manage their responsibilities at least through the first quarter so that we can have the broader discussion during budget about those issues that you talked about. This keeps government running until the budget is passed.

Supplementary supply, on the other hand, is for expenditures that happen throughout the year if that will clarify it. To get into the wherefor of this is not exactly what the interim supply is, but I appreciate your concern, which I think is genuine.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I was talking about concerns that I have with regard to overruns on infrastructure projects, the prime example, the most recent example, at least the one that we're still waiting for, being the southeast hospital in Calgary. Originally that was to have been costing taxpayers approximately \$500 million. Then it gained and gained and gained until it was very close to tripling the budget. As a cost-cutting measure the government decided to whack the mental health part of the southeast hospital. That's a large concern, and I'll be talking about what I see as cuts or poorly run funding for mental health programs.

In terms of other projects that we're yet to see that have been long promised, we were promised in Calgary by former Premier Klein that we would be seeing an expansion to the Tom Baker cancer centre. There had been a degree of controversy as to its location, whether it would be built on the existing site along with the Calgary Foothills hospital or whether there would be room for it found on the U of C campus. There was even a suggestion that it might go out somewhere towards the veterinary college in the Spy Hill area. Premier Klein had committed at that point \$500 million towards that expansion. Nothing has happened since.

In terms of incomplete projects in Calgary that we're still waiting for funding for – and I realize that this is just interim funding – the reality is that this province, I believe, will be the last province to announce a budget. It's almost like our minister of the Treasury Board and our finance minister are looking for some type of divine or global intervention, that the price of oil and gas will suddenly rise in our nondiversified economy to save us all, but I wouldn't bet on that one.

In terms of other incomplete Calgary projects, as I began, the Sheldon Chumir health on 12th, for example, is shelled in to a large extent, but it is far from being a fully operating facility. We have the Rockyview hospital, where we built a whole number of new beds. Then we transferred patients from the old beds to the new beds, and now the old beds aren't being staffed. It was moving day, but in terms of the ability to improve the health outcomes, that didn't happen. We've had recently raised the controversy over the shelling in of the Peter Lougheed, doing the first floor and doing the third floor but skipping the other floors. The justification was: well, we'll shell it in now so that we can actually operate in it at a later time.

Here in Edmonton we've got the Mazankowski heart hospital waiting for its first occupants. The people in Grande Prairie don't know, as don't a number of rural districts, whether they're even going to get their hospital. This uncertainty is not being addressed at this point in this carry-over budget, which does not sort of direct or suggest where the April 7 budget is going to go, and therefore it's a large concern.

3:10

In terms of sort of great initiatives but a failure to follow up, I was pleased to be able to attend this past year the official opening of the Hotchkiss Brain Institute at the Calgary Foothills hospital. Wonderful. But, again, a lot of that particular operation is a shelled circumstance. The walls are there, but in order to pay for the researchers and to carry out the research, the majority of that operating budget comes from philanthropic donations. It's great that we have some very wealthy philanthropists like the Hotchkiss family; however, it is the responsibility of the government to deliver health care. Unfortunately, that's not happening.

When it comes to schools, the government has decided that the way to go is P3s. I talked about the deferred debt. What we have with schools is a reality. The average age of the schools across the province is over 40 years, and the defrayed deficit on the repairs is now approaching \$2 billion. We've seen a series of Band-aids, partial roof repairs, rather than the absolute repairs that are necessary. The defrayed deficit for school infrastructure alone – and I'm not talking new construction – is in the area of \$2 billion. For the Calgary public board alone it's over \$630 million dollars. Each day that we defer putting in the necessary repairs, we're putting students at the potential of physical risk.

We're not dealing with their educational quality. For example, in terms of budgeting we had the Learning Commission recommendation to reduce class sizes. The government has yet to live up to its primary grades, the 1 to 17 average, and kids are being stuffed into staff rooms. Their gyms and stages are being compromised. Their libraries are only partially functioning because permanent classrooms are having to be placed in these areas because there has been basically a moratorium on school construction, and when the province finally did decide to go full speed ahead, they picked the most expensive point in the boom to finally sign those contracts.

Now, I look forward to the Minister of Infrastructure's qualifying the fine print, where it says, apparently, within the contracts that if somehow there's a dip in the economy, then the cost of labour will be considered, and if for some reason materials are less expensive, then somehow this will be factored in. What has not been factored in, at least to my satisfaction or to the satisfaction of Alberta taxpayers in general, is how the interest rates fluctuate over a 32-year period and how by borrowing money at the height of the boom and then paying it back if we can over a 32-year period we'll be able to do that.

When it comes to health, it's absolutely unacceptable that we have patients in hallways. It's unacceptable in terms of financial efficiencies that we've got EMS people basically bidding their time in hallways instead of being out with their ambulances on the road. As a result we're seeing red, yellow, and burgundy alerts far too frequently, which puts patients at risk. Of course, in Calgary since we lost half our hospitals, the response time has gone up considerably, again putting individuals at risk. It concerns me when it comes to Children and Youth Services, for example, how so many needs are not being met. Hopefully, with regard to Children and Youth Services somebody can provide answers. The amount that was requested is 25.9 per cent of the total budget from the estimates of 2008-2009. How much of the \$284,100,000 is going to the Child and Youth Advocate, who was too busy to submit annual reports for three years? How much is going to the ministry's support services? What allocation is there to family support for children with disabilities? How much is allocated for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives? In 2008 funding was announced, but we haven't seen it.

Mr. Snelgrove: It's interesting. The hon. member wants to talk about capital projects, especially Health capital projects, where the

interim supply amount to be voted on is \$4.8 million. Granted that's double what it was last year. Nevertheless, it probably wouldn't even put the signs up on the number of the ones he wants to talk about. I mean, he talks about what the people want. The consistency is very clear; we're within \$8 million on the operational budget from last year – \$8 million. I think that's pretty consistent on a \$9 billion ask. Overall with some of the infrastructure requests – in this one we've nearly doubled the infrastructure request. Transportation is within a few million dollars. This is probably the most consistent year to year.

The Auditor. It's amazing how we would consider that the Auditor is being hamstrung when his total budget in '06-07 was 18 and a half million dollars. That was the total budget. Now for the first quarter we're going to give \$7 million. Well, do the math. Do the math. The office of the Auditor General has grown exponentially. He does a very thorough job, Mr. Chairman, but he cannot nor should he attempt to do all departments and all initiatives all the time. It hasn't been his request at the audit committee. His request has been to fulfill his mandate to audit the ministries, and he puts a shopping list out of other things that would be nice to do.

Mr. Chairman, in today's economic climate there's going to be a whole province full of people who will have to reassess their nice-to-dos. I don't think the average Albertan is going to accept very well that they all have to accept a reduction in their nice-to-dos, but the Auditor would just continue to spend at whatever level he felt. I don't think the Auditor thinks like that. I know that he's reasonable. I know that he spends countless hours working with us to understand where to focus. Where is his money best spent? Where is there some duplication from some of the internal audit processes we have?

Somehow the hon. member would like you to think that there's a sinister plot here, that we've identified the Auditor as somebody we don't want to give money to. All of the officers of the Leg. are going to have to live within the current financial situation we find ourselves in. For him to pick and choose, virtually, statistical information, that doesn't accomplish anything except waste 20 or 15 minutes at a crack. The discussion around interim supply is interesting from their perspective, Mr. Chairman, but it is accomplishing precious little.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me pick up on the remarks from the President of the Treasury Board. This interim supply represents, in the Treasury Board president's own words, enough money to get us through at least the first quarter of the new fiscal year, I believe he said a little earlier on, and perhaps a little bit more than that. I understand that there's some front-end bloating that occurs in some departments and all the rest of that.

3:20

Given the President of the Treasury Board's comments that, you know, every single one of us in this province is going to have to reassess our nice-to-do and nice-to-have lists in light of the current economic reality – and, by the way, I agree wholeheartedly with the President of the Treasury Board that that's true – I wonder if the President of the Treasury Board can speak to the numbers in the interim supply estimates, which are designed to carry us through until we pass and debate fully the new budget. I understand that, and I understand as well that some of the debate on the new budget has to wait until the budget has been presented in terms of some of the details. But I wonder if the President of the Treasury Board can give this House any insight, any clue into whether any of these numbers – be they for his own department, be they for the Ministry of

Infrastructure, be they for any or all of these ministries or for the legislative offices – have taken into account the need to start taking a good hard look at our nice-to-dos and our nice-to-haves.

As it's presented to us, Mr. Chairman, it's just a bunch of numbers, really, next to a bunch of portfolio names and next to very broad, generic descriptions, like expense and equipment/inventory purchases or capital investment or nonbudgetary disbursements, these sorts of things, or lottery fund payments. I mean, it's a bit difficult to look at this book, to stare at a booklet and to stare at it really, really hard and try to somehow psychically glean from this paucity of information what it is that we're actually voting on, what it is that we're actually debating, what the intention of the government is here.

I'm looking for, I guess, a fairly straightforward answer. Is interim supply, then, for this upcoming fiscal year just maintenance of the status quo from the fiscal year about to end at the end of this month, to get us through the first quarter of '09-10 exactly according to the plan that was laid out in Budget 2008, or has the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Finance and Enterprise, and in fact the entire government of Alberta started to take into consideration that financially, economically this is a very, very different world from the one that we were talking about a little less than a year ago, when we were debating Budget 2008, and that the nice-to-dos and nice-to-haves that were kicking around 10, 11 months ago need a very real revisiting? I wonder if I could get an answer from the President of the Treasury Board to that question.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, while it's not an exact science, one could go back if they wished to the interim supply requests for '08-09. Now, in '08-09 we were later and expecting to be somewhat later. Those requests at that time were \$8.9 billion, \$9.01 billion. If one wanted to take the time and go line by line on what is being asked for now as opposed to what was being asked for last spring, they may see an indication that there are some areas where the ask is down and some areas where the ask is up.

Overall, by simply going back to the '08-09 supply requests and transposing those numbers over beside the call on what we ask for now – and it's easier this year than maybe some years because departments have stayed consistent. Although the interresponsibility from departments is getting better and the opportunity for departments to work on initiatives overall are certainly going to show probably better support for those who need it and certainly some internal efficiencies, they could surmise a trend. I wouldn't want to do too much for them on that side; nevertheless, I think that you will see a trend.

The other part that the hon. member talks about is: what have we done to ensure that this isn't just the status quo? That's actually an interesting question. We've had a great deal of success, but it started long before this budget process. It started with our core value reviews of over two years ago when things looked absolutely wonderful out there. The government with all of the departments involved was asked to take a critical look at what they do and what they do with each other. In many ways it's just baseline funding increases, the most appropriate way to address some of the situations that Albertans find themselves confronting.

In our last go, with the Premier's guidance we developed the crime and safe communities initiatives, where all of the departments have to come back to the trough, so to say, for dollars to address that issue because it does not just rest with Justice or Sol Gen or Children's Services or Health; it rests with us all. Making it the responsibility of that department to come in with a plan that is measurable quite quickly: if you want more than just funding for a quarter or more, we have to see the results, and we have to see how

it fits the solution to the issue. With the overview of the peers of the different ministries there and the deputies having to understand the limited amount of money and the issue to get a better bang for our buck, I think that, truly, it might not be the easiest accounting thing to follow. But that doesn't matter to the person who's affected by a child with an addiction or a community where gangs or crime have taken over or someone with a mental illness. I don't think they care about the accounting part of it. They just want to get it fixed. The ministerial working groups and the issues pot to fund to make sure that there's clear, quick results to go to that thing I think is a very solid move.

The other part that's showing more things – and it will be apparent in the budget as we go forward – was the opportunity to do significant departmental reviews, not just have a quick look but get back to “What are you doing? Can someone do it better? Can you do it better together?” and come forward with suggestions. Mr. Chairman, we have a binder full. Once again, this wasn't just started in response to the economic downturn but over two years ago. Dumb luck or whatever. The fact is that government should continually be in a process of reviewing itself. The times change, the needs of the people change, people's priorities change, and sometimes the world changes and forces that change on us quicker than we might be ready for, but I can sit here with confidence and look Albertans in the eye and say that we have been working on making our government better for at least the last two years from a financial point of view.

It's a work in progress, obviously. I think that to answer the hon. member, sometimes when you're dealing with billions, a million seems insignificant or 10 million is ha, ha, ha, an Oprah ha or whatever. But we found literally hundreds of millions of dollars internally, and we found a new process to get the ministers, whether it's seniors or housing or issues around mental health, all at the table working on the issue collectively. It's far, far better for our processes. It's far better for the people that are getting our support.

3:30

So we have done a great deal and proudly say that this isn't a result of the economic downturn. I think it's a result of the fact that we have an obligation to ensure to the people that are paying not only our salaries but are paying the way – it's not our money; it's their money. They want to know that we're spending it appropriately. We're maybe not where you'd like us to be, if that world exists, but we're a long ways from where we were.

Mr. Taylor: I appreciate that rather impassioned defence of a government reorganization that the President of the Treasury Board just undertook, complete with the little dig at whether I'll ever be happy with where you're going. You know what? Chances are that I might be, but in order for me to determine whether I can be happy with where you're going, I've got to know where you're going.

A couple of things stood out in what the President of the Treasury Board had to say there. Yes, you will see some numbers up, some numbers down in terms of the dollar figures beside the various ministries when you compare '09-10, the interim supply estimates, to '08-09, but when you kind of look at the bottom line, it's basically status quo. It's \$8.972 billion on expense and inventory purchases, \$581 million on capital investment, and so on and so forth. Not a lot has changed there from an evidentiary point of view.

Now, I agree with the president. Is the President of the Treasury Board listening closely to this? He should perhaps check it in black and white in *Hansard* later because it's going on the public record that I agree with the President of the Treasury Board that the average Albertan cares a heck of a lot more about getting the problem solved,

getting the issue fixed, than they do about the intricacies of the accounting involved in all that. I understand that. Nevertheless, I still feel as though I'm being called upon here to accept as an article of faith that you guys are working on things and, you know, that the cross-ministerial meetings around whatever table, cabinet or otherwise, that you have your meetings around for these sorts of things are so much more rewarding and fulfilling and enjoyable and presumably productive as well.

Cross-ministerial issues have been a real problem historically, not just in this government. There are always interministerial rivalries and turf protection and so on and so forth. To undertake a reorganization that seeks to specifically address some of those problems and say, “Lookit, if we're talking about safe communities, we are talking about the territory of the Solicitor General, the territory of Housing and Urban Affairs, the territory of Children's Services, the territory of Seniors and Community Supports, Municipal Affairs,” and who knows how many other ministries – perhaps you can in one way or another involve just about every ministry in government in safe communities. To get the right parts of the right ministries working together on the right issues is not only the right thing to try and do, but it's a fairly Herculean task to pull off. To use a phrase that my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has used in this House before, mad props to the government of Alberta for even attempting to do that.

However, we're here today talking about boring old intricacies of accounting, much as I would far rather stand here and talk about fixing stuff. I don't think that there's anybody on this side of the House who's on record more often in terms of talking about the need to solve problems, move forward, and get 'er done than myself. I'm very much into that. But at the same time, when we're talking about in total \$10 billion, we need to have some sense of, I guess, the accounting issues behind it, whether this is the maintenance of a status quo or whether there's real, hard evidence in here, coming back to what I said before, that the government gets the change in economic times and realizes that it, like everybody else in this province, is going to have to re-examine and re-evaluate its nice-to-dos and nice-to-haves.

The thing is that if the ask for interim supply in ministry A goes down by \$10 million this year over last and the ask in ministry B goes up by \$20 million and the ask in ministry C goes down by \$10 million, that doesn't really tell me anything except that we've moved the money around. It's kind of a shell game. It's kind of rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. It doesn't say to me, it doesn't say to the people of Alberta: hey, we get it that times are tough; we get it that we have to really, really, really do a serious job here of reordering our priorities and reallocating our spending.

I'm coming back, Mr. Chairman, to what I asked the President of the Treasury Board before, which is: show me the evidence in this booklet that you've started to address the nice-to-dos and the nice-to-haves and started to reorder your priorities there. I'm sorry, but I can't see them here. I can put '09-10 beside '08-09, and I can see differences in line item numbers beside different departments, but I can't see a trend developing here.

I can't see evidence yet – and I'm prepared to acknowledge that there may be a great deal more evidence when Budget 2009 comes down; I'm also prepared to acknowledge that there might not be – that the reorganization that started nearly two years ago, according to the President of the Treasury Board, which may have paid off in nonmaterial, nonmonetary ways significantly already, is having an impact on bottom line. The reason why I keep coming back to that, Mr. Chairman, is because I think bottom line becomes an issue going forward in this very, very different economy and very different economic situation than we found ourselves in about a year ago.

Mr. Snelgrove: I may want to apologize in advance. I may have been wrong, Mr. Chairman. If the hon. member is starting to agree with me, maybe I'm straying into an area that I shouldn't be.

The difference between the cross-ministry issues of before was that it was very simple to identify the issues that affected the ministries. This process gets to the solution of the problem. I can accept that, yeah, you can't get it out of this book, and I don't think the intent of the interim supply was to drill down to where the hon. member would like to go.

We may even have to go back a couple of more years, probably take a five-year growing total of what interim supply estimates were. While I appreciate that you weren't here, they were growing just as fast as the end of the year spending. Maybe not quite. Your colleagues will be able to tell you that we were routinely coming in for sup estimates for things. There was growth and sups. You may have to go back and see what the numbers were then to see the flat line now.

When you consider that approximately half of what we get as a government or what we spend or is spent on our behalf is the boards and agencies, the health authorities, the children's education, it's the biggest chunk of what we do. We just collect it from wherever, and we give it to them. They're in the same boat as we are, that a huge chunk of what they spend is salaries, is wages.

I think our Premier made it abundantly clear, certainly made it clear to me, that this year we needed to go forward with the agreements we have in place, with our teachers and our nurses and all, and that as you know, we should be the first to show restraint. I think it's fair enough to say that if this continued downturn or situation we're in is worse or shows no sign of abating, it's time then to sit down with our unions and with others and say: "Okay, here's the reality of today. Here's the simple fact. Albertans don't want operational deficits." They have made that clear for generations in this province. They don't want them. So to continue to provide services that Albertans also think are important, we're going to have to work with our service providers to get where we have to go.

3:40

Now, I think the hon. member would agree that a couple of years ago it would have been, I would say, impossible to have the head of the CAW at a news conference announcing that they'd actually sat down with GM and given something back. We saw it here. I think most people who live outside of the industrial part of Ontario, the auto sector, looked at the union agreements over the years and said: "That can't last. There is no way that those industries can stay competitive paying two or three times up front." It didn't seem to matter. The unions were there to do a job, to get the most they could get, and for some reason the senior executives in the car industry seemed more than willing to sell their future into agreements that couldn't be sustainable. Couldn't be. If GM and Chrysler disappear, there will still be cars. Somebody is going to build them, but it might not be those guys that were building them and priced themselves out of them.

As we sit down with our service providers and unions, I think we have to have a pretty clear indication of where we're going. I can appreciate that the longer we can go with a budget, the better chance you have to use the process we have for forecasting revenues. Not to say that it could make a great deal of difference, but you're in here when they're picking away about being out \$10 or \$20 on the current price of oil or a dollar on gas, and somehow, magically, we're never supposed to get that wrong. So the longer you can go to get your projections right, the better and the more notice we can give all the people involved in this government – the nurses, the teachers, the janitors, the whole thing – that we're at a serious piece

of business here. It wasn't about taking out existing contracts. It's about sitting down and saying: "Okay. Here's the situation. Where to from now?"

Where will budgets go? A lot depends on the circumstances that unfold around us. But there shouldn't be any mistaking the fact that if our revenues continue to tumble and no prospect of them coming back at any time soon, we will do as other governments in the past have done: you make the decisions you have to make. It gives me absolutely no pleasure or thrill to suggest that people may have to do with less. I find it difficult myself when I get a raise; I wonder how I lived without it before. But you can, and one of these days we'll get the pleasure of finding out.

The business of governing is sometimes based on audits. Sometimes it's based on outside sources. Sometimes it's based on a gut feeling. In this particular circumstance I think we have made a very conscious and prudent decision to say: let's take a time out. Let's go forward. We know we've been working internally on streamlining what we do. We know Albertans want to see and maintain confidence in the government. The commitment to them before, you know, was: "Work with us. When we get rid of the debt, Albertans will benefit." They've benefited greatly. They're going to benefit greatly down the road because there is the \$14 billion or \$15 billion available to cushion this. But we can't let it get to the day where we're still running deficits without a sustainability fund to do it.

We don't want to sink the ship. This is a course correction. The ship we're all on has kind of slowed down. I think if most people were to look at this, they would say: "Okay. They've managed to get their spending somewhat under control. It's not the final product, but according to this it looks like they've accepted the seriousness of the financial situation they're in. Let's see what's in the budget." More importantly, I believe that Albertans very, very clearly are more interested in what we do than in what you or I or anybody says in here. This is a vehicle in here to pass time. When it hits the ground out there, when the senior or the person in a waiting room or the student going to university gets their service, that's what it's all about.

I can appreciate that, yes, there is not much in this document. As we get into the fuller discussions on budget, then they're very appropriate questions. The ministers will be there, I think, to maybe not satisfy but explain where their priorities have changed. Until then I can only say as Treasury Board that on indications that we give to departments, their response has been overwhelmingly consistent: "We'll do the right thing. We'll look very closely at what our expenditures are. We'll keep an eye on the future." We learn from the past. We don't live in it but learn from that past. Once again, don't get caught looking in the rear-view mirror when there's nothing that can be helped by that.

My good friend and colleague Dr. West, who would be well known to the walls in this building, having gone through some of the most serious restructuring in probably any democratic country's history, said: don't panic; don't overreact. Even by his admission he said that maybe they overstated the need to get rid of the debt, and it came at the expense of infrastructure at the time. Now, hindsight is a wonderful thing. I'll someday hope to pick a barrel of it up myself and then use it whenever I want. But he said: don't overreact.

There are people that won't be happy. Some of the goofballs that run the Taxpayers Federation, whatever, won't be happy until every civil servant is laid off and they're not paying any taxes, I guess. I don't know what the hell they think the world is going to look like, but they're not going to be happy till then.

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

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a couple of points, and I may go backwards instead of forwards because some of the things that the President of the Treasury Board has just said I found quite interesting and I think also disturbing in some ways. I have been around politics for a long time, on the inside, outside. I've run in elections. I've done a lot of things. I've been around a long time. I've watched – I've watched – what I feel to be the losing of democracy. To have a minister stand up in the House and say that we're just passing time: that's not why I got elected, that's not why I believe in this House, and it's not why I believe in democracy. So I found that quite upsetting.

This is where things should be happening. We shouldn't have the attitude in here that one side is the enemy and one side isn't. That's not how it should work. Because an idea happens to come from the other side of the House, it should be respected for what it is, and that goes all ways. So, yeah, I'm a little disappointed in that because I put a fair amount of work into this House.

However, after I have said that, I'd also like to thank the same minister for the explanation regarding supplemental versus interim. Of course, I thought I understood it before you had actually said those words, but I wanted to make this clear. Does this money that these different departments are asking for just go into a pot? How did they know specifically to ask for these numbers of dollars? How did agriculture know to ask for \$190,200,00? How did they know? I'm sure you guys aren't just saying: okay, we've got X number of dollars, and we'll just kind of spread it out. That ministry had to have come and said, "This is how much money we need and for these reasons," which is why I had asked the question of what this money is going to be used for. Somebody has to know what it's going to be used for. You can't just throw it into a pot; at least, I don't think you can.

3:50

You had made some remarks also about the Auditor General and that many things that we were going to have to do might be nice to do. I totally agree with the concept of nice to do and that it will be the difference between want and need. Certainly, there will be some needs out there. But I believe that the Auditor General is a little bit different because he reports to the House. He isn't sort of a part of this House, and I believe that what he does is necessary to do, not nice to do. We need him to do what you have said right from when the Premier was elected: be open, transparent, and honest. If those three things are there, it automatically equals trust, and I'm not altogether sure that there is a great deal of trust out there. There are too many questions that aren't being answered. So I do think that he is a little bit different and that by doing what he does, he's actually pushing forward your message of openness and transparency.

The other remark that was made was about the CAW and about unions per se. Again, I believe that both sides are to blame. Unions are to blame and the employer and the employee are to blame because they're not sitting down at the table looking at a problem as a solution. Again, we've got that us-and-them mentality, and it truly doesn't work. I think we all know that. But there's another thing, I believe, from way back when particularly in manufacturing and certainly in our textile industry part of what happened was that because the union demands were so high, then, most of our stuff went offshore, not just in Canada, certainly in the United States.

There's also another thing to factor in there, in my mind. When you have a difference of a thousand per cent between the guy on the line and the guy at the top, that is the tipping point of where huge problems start coming in. So there is blame on both sides. Again,

I think it's an attitudinal change, and I think that part of the attitudinal change is going to come whether we like it or not. Certainly, what's happening out there in the world on the economic side of it will make us all sit down, take a couple of steps backward, take a deep breath, and hopefully we'll all sit down at the table and be talking about the same things.

Back, I think, to the questions at hand, which are really about the interim dollars: how did these ministries ask for those dollars if they don't know where it's going to go?

Mr. Snelgrove: The ministers don't actually have to ask for what's in here. Their targets are achieved by the process we go through to build a budget. When the targets are set, then the offices of finance and Treasury Board would simply look at the departmental expense for a quarter of the year. This looks after their expenditures in the first quarter. Some have different financial obligations where they fund outside agencies, and they may need a certain amount of front-load, so theirs might be more than what would be a quarter. Some may have no other obligation or may know that they have greater expenditures. Historically it's pretty straight, but for the sake of your questions it's simply stating that this will cover expenditures for these departments for a quarter of the year. It's not that the department comes in and says: well, I need about that much. Once their targets are set and budgets are set, then they do it.

The other thing I want to get back to is that I'm surprised the hon. member would take anything from my statement around the unions other than that it is not about us or them. I made it very clear that we needed to sit down to engage them and on a go-forward basis, with the same information, start to talk about what we can do differently, if we have to, to stay in sync. I know that newspeople like to take what you say and then say what you didn't, but the hon. member doesn't normally do that. If she took from my approach that I was looking for a confrontation thing with unions: absolutely not. I think we made it clear. We need to sit down with them and on a go-forward basis see what we can do, and we'll see how it goes.

To pick out the Auditor. The Auditor's position is critical to the functioning of our trust in a process – I agree – but so is the office of the Ombudsman, who's in the same category; so is the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, whoever he might be; so is the office of the Ethics Commissioner; and so is the office of the Privacy Commissioner.

To anyone who has ever read the Auditor's report from front to back, my most sincere sympathies for a life wasted. But to somebody who's got an issue around FOIP or somebody who's got an issue around ethics, that's just as important or more important than the nerd who has to spend his days thumbing through the Auditor General's report. I don't put a higher value or a lesser value on that office. It makes no difference to me whether you rank them more or less important. Our responsibility is to fund them at a consistent, fair level as it relates to everyone else in the government.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 22, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2009, and would appreciate the opportunity to have some interaction with the health minister on some of the issues that this relates to, depending on how he feels today. We have 20 minutes between us. Otherwise, I could just ask questions, and he can respond at the end of the whole array. What is the minister's preference?

Mr. Liepert: Go ahead.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are we doing 20 minutes jointly, or are you doing 10 and 10?

Dr. Swann: That's the question I'm asking. I'm willing to interact.

Mr. Liepert: Whatever he wants to do.

Dr. Swann: Twenty minutes interacting, if that fits with the minister, is all right.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Fine. Thank you.

Dr. Swann: I very much appreciate the opportunity to talk to this. It's an issue on many people's minds today. It's the major budget item. It's the major area where we see some real danger, from a sustainability point of view, and the lack of control and the lack of understanding of where the extra funding has gone and why the budget has almost doubled in six years. I, for one, haven't seen enough of the evidence and would love to see more of just where the money has been going. I'm hoping that the minister can shed some light on it.

This is interim supply, so we are making up what is necessary to continue to the time of the budget. It does reflect, again, that we haven't had a budget to put into context some of the decisions in this interim supply. What we can say is with declining revenue from oil and gas and that there's likely to be a deficit, this year's budget will be a very different one from past years'.

I guess the primary role of the ministry of health is to prevent, intervene early, investigate, and treat and rehabilitate people to maximize their productivity, health, and opportunities. In that context it would very nice to know just where our budget is going in the context of prevention versus treatment and whether we are going to see a shift towards investment in more prevention and early intervention so that we can actually reduce the impacts of a burgeoning demand on the health system that's not only taking a toll on our budget, that's taking a toll on the health workers, who can't keep up to the demands and are increasingly on stress leave and are increasingly doing overtime and charging accordingly.

That's adding significantly, I'm sure, to the budgets that we're dealing with, the kind of overtime spending that I've heard about in nursing, particularly as we shifted from 80 per cent full-time nursing in Calgary to now roughly 20 per cent full-time nursing and how that came about and what kind of savings that's resulting in. As I indicated at the outset, we've gone from a budget in 2002-03 of \$6.8 billion and in this past year \$13.2 billion. There are some serious changes that are occurring within the system, and I think we need more detail to understand just where this is happening. Is it salaries? Is it equipment? Is it overtime? Is it new technologies? Is it pharmaceuticals? Are we changing significantly the way we're charging for lab tests? I heard one physician in Calgary say that when he orders a test, the standard bill is \$130, whether it's one test or a battery of tests. There's just the standard fee. If that's the case, there is some serious gouging going on in the laboratory services that I think we need to know more about.

4:00

What about radiology and imaging? What's happened to those services, and how is it that they may or may not be contributing to a massive increase in investigative budgets? I've heard the same remarks made about MRIs, that we have increased the number of MRI scans exponentially the last few years and that many of these

are unnecessary. I guess the question is: who is allowing this unnecessary use of very expensive technology, especially at a time when people who most need it are having to wait or pay privately to get those services done? What about long-term care and costs there? What are the impacts of some of the changes that the minister is planning to make in the long-term care setting, and how is that affecting both the capital budget and the operating budget? It would be helpful if the minister could make a few comments about that, and I'll come back with some follow-ups.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure where to start, but let me try and give it a shot. The Leader of the Opposition asked a very basic question: the fact that we have one of the highest cost health systems in the country, and where is the money going? I just jotted down a few notes here as he was speaking. Let me mention some of these. On average we have the highest paid professionals in the country. We have the best senior coverage programs in the country. Overall we have the widest coverage of services in the country. We have the highest inflationary capital costs in the last five years. We have some of the best research. We have union contracts that, quite frankly, don't allow a lot of flexibility in some cases, and the hon. member mentioned a couple of examples.

I think we have a failed system in the way we compensate, especially the way we compensate our medical community. We pay doctors to have people be sick, not keep them healthy. That's where we have to make some changes relative, and I think that in the new contract that we just signed with the Alberta Medical Association, some of those changes are going to happen.

I would say, however, that two of the reasons why we have seen the highest costs in health care in this province are because we probably have some of the highest expectations in the country in this province, and we have what I believe is a lifestyle that has developed when we've got a booming economy. I refer to it as driving fast and drinking hard. You know, Mr. Chairman, all of these sorts of things lead to situations where the system is being used probably more than it should.

In just kind of a general way I think that if you take all of those particular issues in this province and start to drill down into each one of them, you're probably going to come up with a collective reason why we have some of the highest costs in North America and where the money is going. I won't go any further into that.

The leader talked a bit about prevention, and he is much more of an authority because of his past career in the area of prevention. However, there's no question that, as I said earlier, our system is designed to treat the sick, not to keep people healthy, and part of our changes are exactly around that area.

I think we need to have a renewed emphasis, bought into by all Albertans, around the importance of wellness. I've had a number of Albertans come to me, some fairly prominent Albertans, who want to lead an initiative in this province around wellness, and I hope that in the next few months we can put something together that will not be a government-initiated wellness program but will be actually an Alberta-initiated program. I hope to have a little more to announce in the next few months. That would be working with the parliamentary assistant, the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who takes a great deal of interest in this particular area.

We also have, as the member is well aware, a new chief medical officer of health, who is coming onboard here in the next couple of weeks, and I think that he will bring fresh thinking to the area around public health, wellness, and prevention. Then, finally, in that area we have Bill 7 before the House, which is going to change some of the ways that we actually handle public health and, again, the preventative side of things. I look forward to having the discussion on Bill 7.

Finally, the question relative to long-term care. Mr. Chairman, I've had this exchange with the Member for Lethbridge-East on a couple of occasions. You know, we have a fundamental problem that health care is built around the system and not built around the patient. A bit off topic. In a meeting yesterday with the two ladies from Calgary who were introduced in the House with the Lymphedema Association – lymphedema is an ailment, and I guess they formed a small association. The majority of lymphedema is caused after cancer. Our system says that if you've been fortunate enough to have cancer and then get lymphedema, we cover everything, but if you happen to be born with it and don't have cancer, well, you're on your own. That tells me that we've got health care in this province that's built around the system and not built around the patient.

Getting back to long-term care, we have a system that says that if you live either on your own or you live in a lodge or in assisted living and you get to a point where, let's use an example, you can no longer bathe yourself, the operators of that particular facility or you if you're in your own home have really no choice but to move all the way over to the most expensive outside of the acute system, which is long-term care. Again, why wouldn't we build health care around the patient and not around the system? Why don't we provide more actual patient care and not say: "There's the system. You need to fit into the system"? I hope that when we get to deliver our budget on the 7th of April, we can start to put more emphasis, more funding into actual delivery of care and less money into the standard system.

I hope I didn't take too much time, Mr. Chairman, but I wanted to try and deal with those three subject matters.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments very much. I wonder if the minister can make any comments at all about some of the trends in laboratory testing, diagnostic testing, and the potential for overuse of some of these. It's my understanding that there has been such a burgeoning of testing because to some extent we haven't funded the primary care system in a way that physicians are taking the time to do a careful analysis of the individual and the context and the probability of a diagnosis. They're depending so heavily now on doing a battery of testing, including expensive imaging, that we are in danger of bankrupting the system just through inappropriate testing in some cases.

4:10

Obviously, that may apply to pharmaceutical use as well. Instead of taking the time, having a thorough team assessment of a particular problem, we're coming to the wrong diagnosis, treating with the wrong approach, and ending up with complications and more and more demands on a system that is already overburdened. That's one aspect of what I might ask for more clarification on.

The other has to do with the budget in particular, which identifies \$3.2 billion allocated to expense and equipment/inventory with only \$4.8 million allocated to capital investment. I wonder if the minister could comment more specifically on why there's such a discrepancy there.

Mr. Liepert: Let me deal with the last one first because it's a very simple answer. The capital flow of dollars to Alberta Health Services over the past year or two has exceeded the ability to actually spend the money, so Alberta Health Services has, I think, in reserve about a billion dollars. Let's take the south Calgary hospital as an example. We have advanced it in our capital plan, but they are not yet at the point where they pay for the work that's been done. It

hasn't got to that point yet. So we're actually kind of ahead, and for that reason we don't require any additional capital dollars in the short term.

Equipment. I think that what we are attempting to do on equipment is try and catch up on some of our equipment. We have an issue around equipment that hasn't been allocated in capital the way it should have been for the past number of years, and the health regions previously had been attempting to get as much equipment as they could possibly get funded out of operating. As we all know, there's a lot of pressure on operating dollars, so there has been a tendency to have some squeeze there.

The leader is absolutely correct in terms of the overburden and in many cases probably overuse. One of the issues that we believe is going to be absolutely imperative to ensuring that we don't have multiple tests being prescribed by multiple practitioners, as an example, is our electronic health record. As the members know, it's currently before the policy field committee led by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. We've heard presentations that I believe were about to resurrect the bill, if that's the right terminology, and get it back into the Legislature, get it approved. The electronic health record is clearly the tool going forward so that we can start to try and get a better handle on who's prescribing what for whom and the same thing relative to pharmaceuticals.

I can't comment specifically around the lab use, but I believe that the majority of our labs are owned by Alberta Health Services in any event, so really you're kind of taking it out of one pocket and putting it into the other. I'm not so sure that that in itself is an actual expense that is burdening the system, but I think that in many cases what is being overburdened is the patient.

One final comment relative to a team approach in primary care. Clearly, that's our objective. That's part of our AMA agreement. But you know what? We can't force doctors to practise in a primary care network. We can't force doctors to practise as part of a team. I think that what is very important is if you have a team. I visited several of the primary care networks, one recently on the south side of Edmonton that I recall. You know, the diabetes patient comes in, gets assessed by the doctor. The physician then prescribes a program that that patient is on for the next year, and every visit subsequent to that is with a nurse. It's not back to see the doctor. We have to have more of the team concept. There's Taber; there's Pincher Creek. There are a number of primary care networks that work well. That's the direction we're heading. But one thing I've learned in the short period of time I've been here: this is a tough industry to change.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much. My final comments, then, would simply relate to the need for, as I've indicated in the House before, some concrete measurables in relation to the restructuring that has occurred so that in the next 10 years we'll have some sense of whether quality, access, and cost efficiency have improved or decreased as a result of the structural changes which I understand the minister is trying to achieve through this restructuring. Will there in fact be some measurable parameters in which we can assess this latest restructuring in the next 10 years and say yes or no to what has been happening here?

Mr. Liepert: Well, I think the answer is that we absolutely have to because if we don't and we continue to plod along like we are for the next 10 years, we won't have a system in 10 years. I'm very confident, hon. leader, in the new CEO that we've chosen, Dr. Stephen Duckett. If there are 20 things that the leader and I would

put on a list that we wanted to see out of our new CEO, many of them are the same sorts of things: performance measures, physician engagement, and I could go on and on and on. He absolutely epitomizes those 20 things that we need to see out of the system. So, yes, there will clearly be some measures put in place.

I would just like to conclude with these comments, Mr. Chairman. I believe that the nine-month restructuring that has taken place in Alberta Health Services, despite the consternation of the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on occasion, you know, quite frankly, has far exceeded any of my expectations. [Mr. Liepert's speaking time expired] I guess we're done.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I was listening with interest to the minister of health, and he forgot to mention that the restructuring bill, or the tab for that restructuring of his, is \$1.3 billion according to the Premier in his year-end interview. However, it's not that his issues aren't important; they are. They're significant. He has a significant portfolio and a \$12 billion budget. But I have questions for the only cabinet colleague of his with a town named after him, the President of the Treasury Board. [interjection] Lloydminster. [interjection] It's in your constituency.

Now, I, like many others, have been following the financial plan of the government and the interim supply estimates and how our interim supply estimates are going to fit into the budget that we're eventually going to receive on the 7th of April. We look at the allocations and the requests here, and I can understand where it's a budget to tide us over, but as we spend this money or next year's money, I would like an explanation, please, from the hon. minister.

I heard him speak earlier about the ups and downs of oil and natural gas and what they will mean to our budget. Everyone in this House is concerned about whether we'll have adequate revenue from nonrenewable resources or whether we'll have adequate revenue from corporate tax or personal tax. Certainly, I don't think we can expect too much in investment income from the heritage savings trust fund this year. There are a number of revenue streams that are going to be significantly reduced. I would estimate between \$6 billion and \$8 billion less that the President of the Treasury Board is going to have to count this year.

Specifically, now we're not only in a different budget year, we're also in a different calendar year. This is reflected in the third-quarter update, where we now have a new price sensitivity post-January 2009 for oil prices and natural gas. If the Treasury Board president could tell me and taxpayers throughout the province what all this means, I would be very grateful.

4:20

Now, we know that oil price sensitivities will change now, according to the third-quarter fiscal update, by \$105 million. I asked questions about this last week, but unfortunately I didn't receive any answers. When we look at the old price sensitivity for oil – and by old I mean prior to January 1, 2009 – the net change was 130, so if there was an annual change of \$1 in the price of oil, we would either collect an additional \$130 million or, if the price went down, we would be unable to collect that \$130 million. The change now, or the sensitivity, is 235, or a change of \$105 million. With the new royalty rates as oil decreases in price – the rate is price sensitive – we collect less. My question to the hon. minister is: how much less will we collect in oil royalties in this year of 2009-10 than we would have under the old royalty regime?

The same, Mr. Chairman, would apply for natural gas, where we see a price sensitivity that has changed since January 2009. If the

price of natural gas was to increase or decrease by 10 cents, we would collect an additional \$114 million or we would have a reduction of \$114 million in revenue. We see that change by 44. I'm led to believe that if there was an annual change in the price of natural gas in Canadian dollars per gigajoule of 10 cents, if the price went down 10 cents, we would see \$158 million less in our projected nonrenewable resource revenue. I'm referencing page 8 in the third-quarter fiscal update, where I'm getting these post-January 2009 sensitivities. If the minister could enlighten me and taxpayers and members of this House on these questions, I would be very grateful.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, if I could with absolute certainty tell you what we were going to get from oil or gas revenues next year based on price fluctuations and without knowing how much of it we're going to sell – I mean, it's great to say that we're going to get \$100 a barrel, but if we're only going to sell 20,000 barrels a day, you can add up on one end of the equation, and you can lose her all on the other – if I could put a number on that, I've got a hunch I would have a lot better job than I've got right now. Even Mr. Buffett admitted just recently that he got it all wrong, and he's considered one of the great forecasters.

The hon. member is absolutely right that the price sensitivity of our royalty regime right now does make the government more exposed to price fluctuations. It means that if the price of oil goes up dramatically, our income follows, which was a flaw in the previous royalty, particularly on natural gas, where we capped out and the price could go to \$30 and we were stuck at \$3.50. So we took a risk. We said: "We're with you in the oil industry. If it's down here, you've got to keep making enough money to pay your families. We'll take what's there. When it gets good, we get a fair amount, and when it gets great, we get a lot." That was a conscientious choice we made.

I mean, besides the oil and gas we are at a very strong influence of the Canadian dollar. I think it's close to \$273 million now that a 1-cent change makes in our budget. I mean, there's an enormous amount of variable factors that go into it, where you could take a snapshot in time on any day and say that if this and this and this and this are here and we've sold that much, that's what it is. But to just guess forward and say, "Well, you know, what are we going to be, up or down or otherwise?" doesn't suit any reasonable purpose for me to speculate.

The royalty structure in place is fair. It will return to Albertans an appropriate amount for their resource. But I wouldn't want to give the hon. member a dollar figure about what it actually means to our revenues. That would simply be a guess.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. I'll be quite frank: I don't understand that. In any budget document, in any of the fiscal plans from past budget years, certainly, the government has made revenue projections at a set price for both oil and natural gas. I'm not talking about synthetic crude but conventional oil production and natural gas production. There are lists of columns.

With the current prices and with the new royalty regime the price sensitivity is obviously spread wider, so we would collect more at higher prices, but we would collect less at lower prices. My question simply is: how much less at lower prices does the minister anticipate we will collect under the current royalty regime which came into effect in January of 2009? Previous government documents certainly would give projections on how much revenue was to be anticipated.

Mr. Snelgrove: What's that ad they have now? The accountants put it on, you know: if life was that simple. If the hon. member wants to pick a day and tell me what the price of oil is going to be, what the price of gas is going to be, and how much of it we're going to sell, I'll tell him how much of a difference it is from the projection.

The budget projections are not just done by us. We have the same process that we've used for years, where a multitude of energy forecasters look at their best-guess scenario, they put the figures out there, and they anticipate. We take a blend of those numbers, we put it out, and we suggest that's what the number will be for the coming year.

As the hon. member knows, we can think we're very low one day and all of a sudden find out we might be very high the next. It's irresponsible for me to say that we're going to be down \$2,000, \$2 billion, \$3 billion. The hon. member can do the math as well himself. If we don't sell any oil, then the price really doesn't affect us very much. The simple fact is that we know that given the economic situation both our volume and our price are expected to be lower than we would have anticipated last year or the year before.

Mr. MacDonald: We're getting somewhere now, Mr. Chairman. The hon. minister is telling us that it will be lower.

Now, if I look at the fiscal plan from last year, certainly, there is nonrenewable resource revenue. There's an actual, there's a forecast, there's a budget, and there's a target through to 2009-10 and 2010-11. The target revenue for 2009-10 was \$10.7 billion, and the target for the year 2010-11 was \$10 billion. How much less than this target from last year's fiscal plan does the minister anticipate he will be counting in this fiscal year for the budget we're discussing in interim supply?

4:30

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, he can come right back to that desk at this time on April 7, and he'll get his answer.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, Mr. Chairman, when we're discussing interim supply, and we are . . .

Mr. Snelgrove: We're discussing expenditures.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, the document that I'm looking at is an estimate for interim supply. Certainly, the hon. minister is right. They will be calculated into or totalled into all of the expenditures for the entire year. How are taxpayers to have confidence in this government and in this budget process when the minister is indicating that we will have to wait because no one on that side of the House has a number? I do not believe, Mr. Chairman, that no one, particularly this hon. minister, who has a town named after him, knows. I know he works hard, and he works long hours. We're not that far from April 7, and I think someone on that side of the House has to know what the target for next year's revenue will be under the royalty regime that came into effect in 2009, considering the prices that we're getting now for natural gas and conventional crude oil.

The Deputy Chair: I have to ask: are you sharing 20 minutes? The clerk is trying desperately to keep up with the switches on this. You hadn't let me know.

Mr. Snelgrove: Might I ask for unanimous consent to make it 25?

The Deputy Chair: Okay. You are sharing 20.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, interim supply is strictly and simply

the expenditure side of our budget. We make no representation in here whatsoever about what the revenues may or may not be. That's completely within the purview of the minister of finance in consultation with the Department of Energy and the Sol Gen and gaming, that have revenue streams in there. The hon. member would also know that we have to take a certain amount of our lead on revenue projections from the federal government, who collects our taxes for us and remits. We have to use their trending to identify. This particular process we're in is strictly on the expenditure side, which is part of the responsibility of government.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. I would remind the hon. minister – and he knows this full well – that you earn money before you spend it. The hon. minister is telling me that this is just what we're going to spend.

Now, I would like the minister, please, to note that there is a significant difference in these price sensitivities post-January 2009 than what was anticipated in last year's fiscal plan. This is concerning, Mr. Chairman, because the sensitivities to fiscal year assumptions for 2009-10 this time last year when we were dealing with the budget was for the oil price of \$211 million. We see now that it's \$235 million. There is a wee difference there of \$24 million, and I suspect that it is because the price of conventional crude oil has declined more than what was anticipated by the province. I would agree with him that at this time last year it would have been very difficult to recognize that we were going to have such a significant decline in the price of conventional crude oil, but we did, and we have to be prepared for it – we are in sort of a modest way with our plan, which is a stability fund – but also for natural gas.

The government is not nearly out as much, when you compare last year's fiscal plan, because you knew what the calculation was on the new royalty structure, than what is in the third-quarter update as the price for natural gas has gone down. There's an \$8 million difference in the price sensitivity for natural gas. I think we need to clarify this before the government members build the budget for this province. It's clear that as prices go down and we now have this price-sensitive royalty structure, the people who own the resource, Albertans, are going to be collecting significantly less.

Thank you.

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Chairman, my kids and my wife are living proof that you do not have to wait until you make money before you spend it. As a matter of fact, I would think anybody with kids in college or university or a wife whose husband spends most of his time in Edmonton has a propensity to spend far more money and far faster, although we are very well paid and the compensation is terrific in this particular House. I would suggest to President Obama that he could save a lot of this frivolling around he's doing. Give my wife a MasterCard, start in New York, and by the time she hit L.A., their economy would be rock 'n' rolling like no one's business. The idea that you can't spend what you don't have may be foreign to everyone in my family but me.

Back to the sensitivities. It wouldn't matter, Mr. Chairman, if nothing in our royalty structure had changed. The prices have collapsed far past anything that any projector, any business analyst, any energy analyst had even contemplated. As a matter of fact, the governor of the Bank of Canada I think in July said that oil would hit \$200 within a year – \$200. He is a pretty high-paid, smart, informed guy, and he got it that wrong. So any suggestion that the projections on going forward stuff is a complete science would be incorrect. Any suggestion that simply because we have a different royalty structure in effect, it's going to have a worse or a greater effect will be a point for discussion after the finance minister tables her budget with the different modelling included in it to arrive at our final budget.

I'm not going to get into a debate about revenue with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who, I might add, also has some facilities named after him. I think I've heard of the Gold Bar power station and the Gold Bar sewage treatment facility. Like, it's a start. Don't lose faith. I'm sure somewhere, someday, sometime some people will get incredibly drunk and name their town Hughie-minster.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We were discussing price sensitivities here. The only thing I can draw from our exchange is that perhaps the hon. minister is going to be . . .

An Hon. Member: Sleeping on the couch.

4:40

Mr. MacDonald: Not only sleeping on the couch, but he might be having a sandwich instead of a hot meal. Anyway, that was quite interesting.

I was expecting more information on the anticipated royalty revenue than the spending habits of the hon. minister's family. However, I think this is a very, very important issue. These are very, very important questions because of the significant change in these price sensitivities and what they will mean to the treasury. I'm disappointed, again, that I'm not getting the answers that I seek. I would certainly suggest to the hon. members across the way that they have a look at last year's fiscal plan and see what was anticipated in revenue and what in the small, fine print the third-quarter update is anticipating before we go any further with the discussion on interim supply, Mr. Chairman.

With those words, I will certainly thank the minister for his time. I'm disappointed with the information that he has provided to me and to the taxpayers, but I guess I'll have to just put my patience hat on and wait until the 7th.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On behalf of the hon. President of the Treasury Board, I realize the difficult position that you're in. We're on this side making an assumption that you've actually worked with the minister of finance and you've got a reasonable sense of where things are going. If that's not the case at this point in terms of prediction of the assumption of the price of a barrel of oil or a gigajoule of gas, then maybe we're asking too much of you.

Also, it's very hard to limit discussion strictly to interim supply without trying to get a sense of the forecast of where we're heading. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar indicated, we can only reference what has been in the past, so going back into the past – this is for Children and Youth Services – how much is allocated for child and family services authorities? In the '08-09 the total was \$749,336,000. Again, how much is allocated to child intervention services? The '08-09 total was \$377,825,000.

It is very difficult, no doubt, to create a budget when we are so absolutely, inextricably dependent on the price of oil and gas. We have a growing population with growing demands. We can count on certain taxes. Although we have eliminated the health premium tax, which I would think the majority of citizens are grateful for, we've also seen a large portion of that space that was left and the savings left being foisted onto middle-income seniors in the form of increased pharmaceutical costs, especially if they're not on a group plan, as is the case with most seniors, and they're having to pay Blue Cross amounts that have doubled.

One of the concerns that I have is that in terms of trying to save money, we're trying to do things cheaply. It's the equivalent of putting a cheap fix, a partial patch as opposed to dealing with the entire roof if we just keep patching things. I've seen examples of cheaper approaches, and I'm extremely worried in the cheaper approach that's being applied to Children and Youth Services in the form of decertification. We've got seniors and children, our two most vulnerable members of society, and we're going to have child care workers that aren't certified, that won't have had the education and won't have had the experience. That's a concern, and it seems to be a pattern.

This government instead of bolstering municipal police forces, instead of standing behind the RCMP for example, has decided to do policing on the cheap. They've hired a tremendous number of sheriffs, who are considerably less costly than RCMP because they don't receive the same amount of training, and therefore the cost of their education is considerably lower and their salaries are considerably lower. Again, this is an example of doing things on the cheap. I'm concerned that when you operate that way, in the long run you end up paying out a whole lot more money.

Now, on the positive side the government has realized and gotten behind the 10-year plan to end homelessness. Forget the moral business of being your brother's keeper, but they've realized that it makes financial sense to provide 24/7 care for the people who are most costing of the system, whether it be through mental illness, whether it be through addictions. They've realized that for approximately \$30,000 a year they can provide 24/7 care for those individuals. They can support them. They don't just put a roof over their head. I wish that sort of all-inclusive support and care notion that's being provided for the hardest to house was applied to other areas.

In this recessionary time frame I'm extremely worried for Alberta's children. The latest StatsCan indicated that we have 78,000 Alberta children living below the poverty line, and poverty very much restricts your choices. As the recession grows and more and more Alberta families are put under the pressure of either a husband or a wife losing a job, tensions increase within the family. And it won't be over, necessarily, whether you have a gold card and you're travelling across to solve President Obama's expenses; it will be whether you can just plain survive.

Last year almost 19,000 women, with children in arms in many cases, were turned away from women's shelters, and there has not been a significant increase in funding for shelters. The Sheriff King Home did receive some funding. The Inn from the Cold received a small amount of funding. But in terms of interim supply and tide-over funding there's not a whole lot there when it comes to sheltering individuals.

Also, the way the government directs its funding. We had the example, I believe, for the homeless and eviction fund of having paid out \$121 million – and probably that was months ago – instead of putting pressure on landlords to charge reasonable rents. As a result taxpayers are out a tremendous amount of money, the rents are guaranteed to the landlords, and the prices don't go down. Part of our recession is being very much experienced by anybody who builds houses. There's a tremendous downturn in housing starts, and that again affects affordable housing.

In terms of education, if we don't deal with the approximate \$8 billion in total of the unfunded liability for teachers and pay that down on a regular basis, then that's going to multiply. Again, I don't see within this interim supply a specified amount. The government can get away with just paying I believe it's \$85 million to the fund, but if that's all they pay, then these fees are going to increase.

4:50

Another concern I have and I don't see reflected in the interim supply but hopefully will be dealt with in the budget is school psychologists. There has been some troubling discussion about doing away with coding for children, and it's based on coding that aides are provided for children with learning disabilities.

We're opening our arms, as well we should from a Canadian standpoint, to a number of individuals seeking refugee status, which is very much dramatically affecting pressures on English as a second language. A number of the children that we're receiving from war-torn areas such as Darfur don't have literacy in their first language, and therefore dealing with the emotional trauma that they've gone through and trying to give them some sort of English as a second language structure when their own language structure is limited is extremely challenging. It requires funding and support. Unless we address this in the early ages, have children reading by the time they complete grade three, then the cost to the system is just going to skyrocket.

Also, in terms of where the government spends money, it's sometimes questionable. For example, the amount of money spent on standardized achievement tests is higher than the amount spent on developing curriculum. There are good expenditures. There are good investments. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] I'll look forward to talking about some of them.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Some of those good expenditures that I'm looking forward to talking about are doing such things as working on eliminating child poverty. I indicated the figure of 78,000 children. Now, poverty costs a tremendous amount because those same children who are living in poverty are also suffering nutritional difficulties. Since good nutrition is a key to good health and, obviously, a key to good learning, the cost of poverty when combined with the cost of illiteracy is very much affecting our ability as a province to move forward. It has been estimated by a number of literacy organizations that 40 per cent of Albertans are functionally illiterate. If they're functionally illiterate, their ability to perform within their jobs or to increase their employment possibilities, and therefore their ability to pay taxes, is a concern. So, obviously, investment in education and literacy is extremely important.

We have to be looking for greater efficiencies where the money can best be provided, where we would receive less risk. Now, I agree with the hon. minister of the Treasury Board that we have to live within our means. Although the minister of the Treasury Board indicated that, you know, we should be as concerned about, for example, the Ethics Commissioner, as concerned about the Ombudsperson, the roles that the various departments face, it's the Auditor general who creates the fiscal map. If we followed the Auditor General's recommendations, then we would be saving great amounts in terms of efficiency and putting ourselves at considerably less risk.

Just an example of recommendations the Auditor General made in his October 2008 report – and it would be interesting if someone could comment on to what extent these have actually been embraced – on page 15 of his report under AIMCo, internal control certification, recommendation 32. Keep in mind that AIMCo is the outfit that manages our finances. I believe that they're in the area of approximately, in terms of assets, \$72 billion, although at the rate we're losing lately, that sum may have gone down. This is what Auditor General Fred Dunn, our pilot, suggested:

We recommend that Alberta Investment Management Corporation introduce a process to prepare for internal control certification by:

- ensuring that its strategic plan includes internal control certification.
- developing a top-down, risk-based process for internal control design.
- selecting an appropriate internal control risk-assessment framework.
- considering sub-certification processes, with direct reports to the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer providing formal certification on their areas of responsibility.
- ensuring that management compensation systems incorporate the requirement for good internal control.
- using a phased approach to assess the design and operating effectiveness of internal controls.

That was recommendation 32. Hopefully it's being followed.

Recommendation 33 has to do with ensuring completeness and accuracy of private equity partnership investments. This recommendation has been repeated because, obviously, it wasn't followed the first time. "We again recommend that Alberta Investment Management Corporation reconcile its investments in private equity partnerships to the audited partnership financial statements."

Recommendation 34, international swaps and derivatives association agreements. We know how many of us have gotten burned with derivatives.

We recommend that Alberta Investment Management Corporation regularly review its International Swaps and Derivatives Association agreements to ensure that they protect it from the risk of default by its counterparties. We also recommend that the Corporation document the reasons for any changes to the standard form of the agreement.

Just think how many of us within this House who had sufficient funds to invest wish that those same precautions were taken by our supporters, our auditors, our financial advisers.

Now, the Auditor General also had a whole pile of recommendations – and I won't share them all – for the Alberta Treasury Branches. The Alberta Treasury Branches, upon which so many Albertans are dependent for loans because the larger banks are less likely to lend than the Alberta Treasury Branches, made some very questionable investments with asset-backed commercial paper. It's no wonder that the Auditor General is recommending that they rein in their risk.

This is what he's saying to them to implement as soon as possible. He's saying to ATB to

- develop and document the business rules and operating procedures required to implement the improved investment policy being developed.

In other words, don't go risking, as you have done before, with asset-backed commercial paper. Make sure that your obligations – possibly invest more in bonds seems to be a recommendation that financial advisers are suggesting. Be less risky. You may not get the same interest increase, but at least you won't lose from your principal, as so many people have witnessed.

- improve its process for establishing Global Financial Markets' performance targets by discussing the targets with senior Asset Liability Committee (ALCO) and maintaining evidence that supports decisions made.
- implement the updated investment and derivative policies for changes arising from its recent review of those policies. We also recommend that ATB undertake a review of the financial risk management policy.

Now, considering that ATB is one of Alberta's main bankers and the dependency that people, especially in rural areas, have on this financial institution and the fact that Alberta taxpayers are on the hook for any of its failures, these are very good recommendations that the Auditor General has made.

He also goes on to suggest: "complete its business rules on how variable pay is calculated for Global Financial Markets' staff by

clarifying how to deal with revenue not collected and investment losses.” What he’s referring to there has to do with the fact that even though head individuals within the Alberta Treasury Board made some very poor financial risk decisions, they still received significant recompense for the bad decisions they made. He’s also suggesting, as soon as possible is the key here, to “review the role of the Asset Liability Committee (ALCO) and consider restructuring it into two tiers.”

5:00

Now, I realize that everyone here has the opportunity to read the Auditor General’s report, and although the minister of the Treasury Board suggested that only geeks would enjoy this type of reading, I don’t consider my honourable chair of the Public Accounts Committee a geek. I actually see him as a role model. This is, in his estimate, required reading if you’re going to be on top of your finances.

One of the areas that I think the government could potentially save some money on is either to get rid of its task forces and public consultations or actually listen to the results. If we go back to 2005, we had the long-term care task force. If we’d followed those recommendations, we wouldn’t have so many seniors taking up bed space in hospitals. There would be long-term care homes for them, and the care that they would receive would be grade A. There would be proper pay for individuals, there would be a recognition that medications should be decided by registered nurses, and there would be greater care provided. Unfortunately, the Auditor General has recommended year after year after year. . . [Mr. Chase’s speaking time expired]

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate these opportunities.

Another task force that unfortunately brought back great ideas but was rejected was the Affordable Housing Task Force. Now, in terms of rejection there were a number of members, some still present, others now gone, who travelled the province, held forums. They spent an awful lot of time and effort and, in the process, money consulting with Albertans. What could be better? But then when they brought back all their recommendations, the government rejected 38 out of the 50 recommendations. They rejected the idea of a temporary freeze on rents, and instead we’ve seen the government pay out \$121 million to subsidize landlords and keep the prices high.

The most recent example of consultation is the parks survey that the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation put out. That survey went out, and people who filled it out and took the time to engage in the process said: we don’t want more availability for ATVs into park areas. The numbers were extremely large, saying: “We don’t want greater access into parks. In fact, we want less access. And while you’re at it, how about fixing up the trails that are currently deteriorating in the parks?” These were recommendations, yet we had the Member for Athabasca-Redwater talking about increased access for ATVs and snowmobiles. Again, there are trails. We’ve got cutlines. We’ve got so many forestry roads. We’ve got so many extraction roads for a variety, whether it’s timber or whether it’s for oil and gas. There are places for people to play. If we’re going to survey, let’s take them and actually act upon the survey.

In terms of surveys we’ve had the minister of sustainable resources. He has certainly surveyed people considerably on grizzlies and protecting grizzlies, yet we have him currently talking about potentially restoring the hunting and taking away the protected status. We’ve had input on pine beetles and whether clear-cutting,

particularly in parks and protected areas, is the way to go to combat the insect. Each time I give the government credit for having sent out the survey or asked for feedback or held the public forum. But when you ignore what Albertans have asked for – and it’s not pie-in-the-sky types of things. Four per cent of our land is set aside for parks and protected areas. Actually, protecting that is not a horribly large expectation. We have opportunities to not only listen to Albertans but to wisely take their suggestions, implement them, legislate them, and in so doing, save money, create efficiencies.

Again, I’m very grateful for the Auditor General. The Auditor General has made a number of recommendations, whether it be for improving our mental health systems or for postsecondaries, for example, making sure that the money that taxpayers send to institutions is not placed at risk. If we’re going to diversify, if we’re going to move forward, then spending money investing in postsecondary, investing in research and development is going to be extremely important.

Here’s just a very brief recommendation that the Auditor General made with regard to postsecondary. Here’s his first recommendation.

Clarify standards and expectations.

We recommend that the Department of Advanced Education and Technology:

- clarify its standards and expectations for non-credit programs and clearly communicate them to public post-secondary Institutions.

So where should the government start? It should start increasing its own efficiency and thus provide a better product for the postsecondaries. Set the example. The Auditor General, within that same recommendation, says:

- work with Institutions to improve the consistency of information that Institutions report to the Department.

I didn’t see anything within this interim about increased postsecondary seats, for example. I’m hoping that that will come out in the main budget. Promises were made that haven’t been fulfilled. As of last fall we were supposed to have received 15,000 more university seats. That hasn’t happened. We’re supposed to by 2020 have an increase of 60,000 seats. If we want to diversify our economy and create opportunities and have people paying the taxes that we need to sustain this province and sort of wean us from our resource dependency, then being well educated and moving up the wage bracket is one way to achieve that.

Now, the Auditor General, to his credit, has made recommendations in a variety of areas. That is why I am concerned, as where I began, that by undercutting the Auditor General as opposed to following his recommendations, we’re going to be wasting more money instead of conserving it. One of the things the Auditor General found he talks about on page 17 of his April 2008 report. “We found, for example, Institutions that did not include all incremental overhead costs of providing a non-credit program in their analysis of whether to provide the course, or what to charge for it.” Now, considering how tuitions have gone up, you would think that it would be very important for an institution to know what the cost of its program was going to be. Potentially it’s overcharging the students who are working three jobs just to be able to attend the institution.

The Auditor General suggests, for example, that “the approval processes were not well defined, and the same person often initiated and approved a course. This resulted in courses proceeding with only a few students,” – and that’s certainly not economically viable at the postsecondary level although class reduction at the primary level would produce great investments – “and sometimes just one student, or without a signed contract.”

5:10

Now, the amazing thing about the Auditor General's department is the depth and breadth of the individuals within the department and the fact that we don't have enough money for him to do his reporting. I can't think of a single department that's more important.

Anyway, the Auditor General:

We recommend that the Department of Advanced Education and Technology

- clarify . . . expectations . . .
- work with Institutions . . .

We recommend that the Department of Advanced Education and Technology implement effective processes to:

- monitor whether Institutions report information consistent with its expectations.

How can you tell that you're getting the output without the correct input? Are we making wise investments? What is the expectation?

Under implications and risks with regard to postsecondary the Auditor General says, "Lack of effective monitoring of non-credit programs may result in poor decision-making and programming quality." Well, having paid a tremendous amount for inflated tuitions, some of the highest in Canada, students should be guaranteed quality course work. The Auditor General goes on to say, "It also exposes the Institution to unmitigated risks and liabilities." Like, if you're not providing the education that you're stating that you're providing, you know, you're wasting students' money; you're wasting students' time.

I'll allow one of my other members to participate.

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 19(1)(c) the question must now be put on the motion for consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech. I'd therefore invite the hon. Deputy Government House Leader to move that the Committee of Supply rise and report progress so that the Assembly may vote on this motion.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, it'll be my pleasure to in fact move that very motion, that the Committee of Supply now rise and report progress as noted.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2009-2010 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, general revenue fund, and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Acting Speaker: On the motion does the Assembly agree with the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Consideration of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Johnston moved that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 3: Mr. Oberle]

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

9. **Mr. Zwozdesky** moved on behalf of Mr. Stelmach:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

The Acting Speaker: This motion is a debatable motion. Does any member wish to speak?

Hearing none, does the hon. Deputy Government House Leader wish to close?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the support, hon. members. On that note, I would move that we close the debate.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Back under consideration for Committee of Supply are the 2009-2010 interim supply estimates.

Interim Supply Estimates 2009-10 General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund (continued)

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. An area that I would like to talk about because I am concerned that it's being compromised in this interim budget is mental illness. I am very concerned that as part of the superboard's restructuring it has taken over the responsibility for mental illness as well as for AADAC as well as for the Cancer Board. I'm concerned that one centralized organization has potentially bitten off more than it can chew and that the various organizations such as mental illness may not be provided for to the extent that is required.

We've seen the first proposed – well, it's not proposed; it's out there. We've seen the first cutback in mental illness and treatment with the reduction of mental illness beds at the new south Calgary hospital. Before it's even up and running, it's already been cut. Likewise, we've seen that same type of reduction of beds with regard to the children's hospital in Calgary-Varsity. It barely has more beds than it had back in 1950, when the population was about one-third of what it currently is now.

Again, a statistic that I have concern about is that mental illness can strike up to 40 per cent of the population. If mental illness is to strike an individual, there's a 50 per cent chance of it happening before the person reaches 14 years of age, so early diagnosis and treatment are absolutely essential.

The Auditor General, in talking about mental illness, presents some very important and to some extent shocking cases directly relevant to the Alberta situation. Mental illness and the onset of mental illness can be triggered by a variety of circumstances, but the pressure that individuals and families are under during a time of recession, during a time of job loss, during a time of downsizing can very much trigger mental illness. The Auditor General states on page 65 of the April 2008 report:

It's hard to overstate the impact of mental illness on our society. According to recent estimates, one in five Canadians will suffer from mental illness. In 2002-2003, over 500,000 Albertans were treated by a physician for a mental health related problem. This represented over 2.25 million visits to a physician and accounted for 39% of all general practice physician billings. Overall, about \$472 million in public funding was spent on mental health services, about 7% of the total amount spent on healthcare services in Alberta in 2002. As many as 15% of police contacts are with people with mental illness.

For example, the drop-in centre. It's suggested that a third of the individuals within the drop-in centre are suffering from mental illness. It's assumed that approximately 30 per cent are suffering from addictions.

Suicide is strongly linked to mental illness and remains one of the leading causes of death in Canada, higher than deaths by homicide or motor vehicle accidents.

Alberta has amongst the highest suicide rates. Therefore, investments in trying to provide security and stability from a very early age are going to produce tremendous results both in decreasing the cost of treatment but also in increasing productivity.

5:20

This is from page 68.

We found that the [Alberta Mental Health Board] and Department have systems intended to monitor progress on the Plan's implementation priorities, but those systems are not well designed and cannot determine whether the Plan as a whole has successfully progressed.

We made two recommendations that will strengthen systems for the second round of provincial mental health planning.

This is a concern because we've gone from regional autonomy, a regional authority treating individuals with mental illness close to where they can receive the access and the treatment, and the authority for that treatment was at a local level. Now, unfortunately, that's been put into the blender of the health superboard, and I'm not convinced that those local needs are being met. I know that when we get calls to the office in Calgary-Varsity, people are asking: "Well, who do I go to? If it's no longer under the responsibility of the Calgary health region, then who's going to look after this?"

When it came to assigning responsibilities, the Auditor General pointed out:

We would have expected a summary from the central entities with the priorities listed and responsibilities assigned. The summary would have defined who was responsible for the various stages in the accountability cycle. Such a summary was not created. However, staff at the central entities understood who was in charge of implementing each priority. They were less certain about who monitored, reported, and adjusted each priority or the Plan in general.

Now, doesn't this make you think in terms of what happened in Vegreville? Who was in charge when the infections broke out? Then we had to try and get ahold of the people who had received treatment there.

In terms of trying to provide some stewardship to the Mental Health Board, which, as I say, is now part of the responsibility of the superboard, on page 72 the Auditor General recommends his third recommendation.

We recommend that the Alberta Mental Health Board and the Department of Health and Wellness, working with other mental health participants, strengthen implementation of the Provincial Mental Health Plan by improving:

- implementation planning,
- the monitoring and reporting of implementation activities against implementation plans.

You've got to have something to judge against.

- [and] the system to adjust the Plan and implementation initiatives in response to changing circumstances.

Well, recessionary times and increased pressure are definitely a new circumstance.

He goes on to say on page 76 that this is what could happen if his recommendations aren't carried out.

Implications and risks if recommendation not implemented Without a documented implementation planning system (especially in a collaborative field like mental health), there is a risk that:

- Deliverables, timelines, targets, and resourcing may not be established;
- Activities may not be co-ordinated;
- There may be no foundation for monitoring and reporting priorities for the Plan as a whole;
- It may be difficult to determine whether progress is being made.

I mean, having taught for 34 years, I checked out the progress of my students with a variety of tests. There was an expectation from the parents that I would have checks and balances, that there would be reporting procedures.

But the Auditor General has concerns. He says:

Without monitoring the implementation of such a large undertaking, it's possible that priorities may not be actioned or unfold as planned. As well, those responsible will not have a system to alert them to issues that require remediation. Without a system of remediation, momentum on Plan implementation may stall.

Well, that's hardly surprising. If you don't have a plan, how will you know if you achieved it? This is what we're seeing more and more.

His fourth recommendation, found on page 77 of his April report:

We recommend that the Department of Health and Wellness ensure there is a complete accountability framework for the Provincial Mental Health Plan and mental health services in Alberta.

I'm picking and choosing. I'm by no way reading this document in detail. But he goes on:

Develop regional mental health plans. Within the scope of this provincial plan, regional health authorities should begin to work immediately on identifying priorities, service gaps and regional mental health plans.

So he's saying that even though a superboard is under way, local input and responsibility and oversight are absolutely key.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Chairman, the last hour has been comparable to constant fingernail scratching on blackboards. You know, we have an opposition here who goes on at length about democratic reform and democracy, and then we have this member standing here for the last 15 minutes reading a three-year-old report by the Auditor General. Now, this just is the absolute – I mean, what is the old saying? The definition of insanity: keep doing the same thing over and over again and getting the same results. I would suggest that, actually, it kind of fits because he's talking about mental health. I would suggest that maybe some of us, you know, have no desire to sit here until 6 o'clock tonight, but we're relegated to be here. So let's actually make some use out of this time and quit listening to somebody who talks a good story and then stands there and reads out of a three-year-old Auditor General's report line for line. Just absolutely bizarre.

I'm going to talk for my full 10 minutes because I'm sick of listening to you guys. When my time expired, Mr. Chairman, I was being asked, actually, I must say, some very relevant questions by the Leader of the Opposition. I wish he would instill some of his relevancy into the member who has just been I was going to say speaking but I would say droning on for the last hour, I think it has just about been.

You know, when we first embarked on changes to our health care system in this province some nine months ago, we made some decisions that I know will change the way we do health care and deliver health care in this province. During the past nine months I, frankly, expected that we would have some issues. Any time you go through a restructuring, Mr. Chairman, you expect there are going to be some issues. But I would say that the health care delivery in this province in the last nine months has far exceeded what I thought we would be getting delivered. It has certainly been as good as or probably in many cases better than what was being delivered prior to the amalgamation on May 15 last year.

I'll give you a couple of examples, Mr. Chairman. I was meeting with one of the CEOs of a major hospital in one of our two major cities. I won't say which one or who it was, but we went down to the cafeteria, and I said: okay, no BS; tell me how this is going. She said to me: this is the first time since I've been working in this system that Calgary and Edmonton actually talk to one another, that we actually have a working relationship between Calgary and Edmonton. She said: "You know, when it comes to neonatal care, it had gotten so bad between Calgary and Edmonton that when Capital Health needed assistance on neonatal care, their first call was to Saskatoon, and in Calgary the first call was to Montana. As a result, we have quads in Calgary who are American citizens not by choice but because there wasn't a working relationship between Calgary and Edmonton." Well, Mr. Chairman, we fixed that, and we're not going to let that kind of stuff happen in this province going forward.

5:30

Mr. Chairman, we had a situation in the Chinook health region where some seven years ago the board and the CEO in Chinook decided that they could no longer with an aging population continue to provide long-term care to patients the way they had previously been doing it. They embarked on a new model. It's called designated assisted living. I know the Member for Lethbridge-East doesn't like to hear this because it's working.

Well, Mr. Chairman, in the seven years since they adopted that model in Chinook region, they have not had to increase their long-term care beds. The capacity with designated assisted living, if anyone is prepared to go have a look at it, provides equal or better care for some of these seniors at a significantly reduced cost in an environment that they feel much more comfortable in. My question to them was: why don't other regional health authorities adopt this measure? The answer to me was: we tried, but nobody seemed to be interested because it happened to originate in Lethbridge. Well, we're going to fix that, too. Under our new model in this province we're going to provide options for our seniors. We're going to provide options so that the seniors will have some choice. They will have additional care where they feel comfortable. We're not going to simply continue to build long-term care and institutionalize our senior citizens.

I think what we need to now start to see happen in this province – we had a very ambitious 2008. We brought forward a number of strategies, including continuing care, children's mental health, a pharmaceutical strategy, and several others that we now have to see seep into the system and start to be implemented in the system. The

one thing we don't want to continue to do is trot out policy and not give it a chance to be implemented. Despite the fact that some of the members of the opposition want to always look in the past and live in the past, we're not going to move backwards. We're going to continue to move forward.

Mr. Chairman, this health care system 10 years from now will look different than it does today. I'm not exactly sure what it's going to look like 10 years from now, and I don't think anybody in this House can predict what it's going to look like. I can tell you that it's not only going to look different, but it's going to look better, and it's going to preserve our publicly funded health care despite all of the opposition that will come from across the floor.

Mr. Chairman, with that, I'll listen to some more scratching on the blackboard.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. It's very difficult as an elected individual who believes in facilitation and collaboration to, instead of receiving answers on the topic of mental health, be subjected to put-downs and character assassination as opposed to focusing on issues raised. The issue that is being raised is mental illness. The minister talks about my droning on and dealing with historical documents. Mr. Minister, this is from April 2008. The date today is March 10, 2009. This wasn't three years ago. The fact that it seems like ancient history to you is a large concern to me.

I'm going to share one more mental health recommendation. I think it's extremely important, and hopefully the minister doesn't shrug this off as he has shrugged off other comments that have been raised. On page 89 of this less than a year old document, April 2008, this is the alarm the Auditor General raises. He says:

Take immediate action to establish a province-wide suicide prevention strategy. Suicide is a serious problem in Alberta and work should begin immediately on a province-wide suicide prevention strategy targeted at the general population, school aged children and vulnerable populations, especially Aboriginal youth.

To the minister: where are you at in the immediacy of dealing with suicide prevention under your superboard?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister of health? No?

Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm delighted to be able to stand up and be a part of this discussion, and I promise the minister of health that I won't read out of the book.

First off, I totally agree with him, and I think that moving into a one-board situation is probably one of the best moves that has happened in this province. From my experience in long-term care and working within that system, it was quite clear that I couldn't move someone from one region to the next and have them assessed the same way. I have many stories that are quite heartbreaking around that, so yes, absolutely, one board. No problem.

However, it has been mentioned that – and I realize that this will take time because they're trying to straighten it out. I did have occasion to try to find somebody specific within the Chinook region, if that's what they're still called, so I called just the general number and said who I was. "Can you tell me who the hell is running the joint?" They said, "Well, that is such a good question." So I went to about three people until I finally found the person I needed, which I realize is working out the kinks. We really do need someone regionally that we can go to rather than having to try to go through Mr. Hughes' board. Through the way he sent letters to us, I'm

assuming that he'll have somebody assigned to MLA offices so that when our MLA offices have concerns, it'll go through a specific, probably government liaison that would be under the board. I'm just assuming that that's the way it'll be.

Continuing care. I think that the minister of health and I have often been speaking sort of at odds when, in fact, we're on the same page. Continuing care includes all of the things that he has talked about, and it does include long-term care. I'm not necessarily advocating that it has to be a separate, stand-alone building. What I'm saying: it goes along with the designated assisted living, assisted living, enhanced lodges, lodges, or apartments for seniors.

The whole idea is that people can age in place, but beyond that, I think we need them to be able to live out their lives in place. For instance, in Lethbridge we will be getting new designated assisted living because I think that's the way the board will probably push them. But my contention is that part of that designated assisted living still should be for long-term care because it's not the housing that's the problem. It's the care that's the problem. If someone comes in one end of the building and they're walking and they go out the other end of the building feet first – they walk in vertical; they go out horizontal, feet first – they should be able to receive the care that they need so that they're not being moved around like bags of potatoes from one place to the other side of town to the other side of town or, in fact, could well be moved out of their community. I think that this is all underneath continuing care, and each place has its own need and its own use in how we can help our seniors move through this.

The word “warehousing,” of course, comes up many times, and the last thing that I would ever ask for is that we warehouse our seniors. I want them to receive the care that they need. Now, when we deregulated long-term care, it was divided into two ministries, so again that makes it complex. But the housing side isn't necessarily the problem; it's the care side. The housing actually can make money, and that's why so many private operators are going into it. What they don't want is the care side because the care side has heavy, heavy expenses on the labour side. We need people that are trained, and we need many of them, particularly towards the end, from the extreme designated assisted living into the long-term care, when the care levels certainly increase.

It does become very complex. At this point in time I think we've got almost 200 people in a hospital tying up beds because they need that care and there's nowhere for them to go. There's no reason that they couldn't go to designated assisted living, because that's the next level up to where they would be, for long-term care, but in that building they should be able to get that extra care. You can move staff. If you need extra staff on the long-term care side, you could move that staff in, but they could still work in other parts of the building.

5:40

From my own experience I think it's good for staff to move around so that you're working with different people all the time. It's very easy to get burned out. You're overworked, you're understaffed, or you're working short, whatever. You do give so much of yourself in that line of business. So to be able to move around and have different kinds of people that you're working with – you do get burned out if you're always on an Alzheimer's unit. Let's move into something that may be lighter care and where the people are a little bit more copacetic in terms of being able to respond to you on a cognitive level.

One thing, again, with the changes – and I may not agree with it, but I can understand it. When they made the changes to the long-

term care and into designated assisted living, it certainly decreased the cost to the system, but it did increase the cost to the residents. I think that that's something that would have to be looked at, certainly, in terms of the medications. Again, I guess a pharmaceutical plan would probably be good, and we'd have to look at the Blue Cross coverage. Many of these people, of course, would qualify for benefits anyway.

One thing that I used to always say to the staff at Edith Cavell, where I worked – and I really had very good staff. People considered me competent and good at my job, but the only reason I was was because I had excellent personal care aides that worked under me. When they came to me with problems, I understood them. You knew the ones that you could trust totally. I didn't have to go double-check. I knew exactly what they were talking about. Part of that was because there are some people that still work at Edith Cavell that have been there for 20 and 25 years, and (a) that speaks to a good employer, and (b) it speaks to people who are really dedicated to their jobs. I always used to joke when I was at Edith Cavell that I was probably going to be there until I moved in and that I wanted to make damn sure that the staff was good so that they would look after me and that I would have a good room.

Those are just some of my comments. I would be interested in the reciprocal comments.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister of health.

Mr. Liepert: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would be delighted to respond. Again, I appreciate the positive comments made by the Member for Lethbridge-East. In many ways I do agree with her that we are attempting to get to the same end.

The very first part of her comments was around communications and communications relative to the new board. If you speak to the chairman, Ken Hughes, he will openly admit that if there's one thing that he feels they could have done better during this whole administrative change, it's in the area of communication. [interjection] You know, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you might want to have a discussion with your friend right behind you because she just complimented us on moving to the one board. You have an internal problem over there. What was the company that he used to be on all the time? Enron. That was the company. I suggest that you maybe take your colleague out for dinner tonight. She could actually tune you in a bit on this whole health thing, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Chairman, I absolutely accept the comments relative to communications. As a matter of fact, my colleague to the right, the Minister of Environment, had mentioned to me one time something very similar to what you said, that when I need to call somebody in Medicine Hat, I'm not exactly sure who to call anymore, and that's fair.

Now, I think it's safe to say that what the board did not want to necessarily do is put into place a permanent structure that the new CEO was going to have to inherit. They want to let him build his own structure. I would suggest that as we move forward, that's something where we need to ensure that as part of the structure that the new CEO builds, there is that contact point for MLAs in their particular region. I can guarantee you, Member, that I will get as much hassle from back here as I will from over there if we don't have that contact in the local community.

To talk a little bit about continuing care, the member made a comment that I think I have to take exception with. She was referring to the fact that under our current model, with our caps on residency in long-term care private operators can make money. I'm not sure who she's talking to, but every indication I receive con-

stantly from providers, whether they're public, nonprofit, or within the health services system, is that one of the challenges we face is that we have caps for accommodation and then we fund the care side of it separately through Alberta Health and Wellness. That has been a challenge. In fact, this past year, in this budget year, our combination through my colleague the minister of seniors, from an increase in accommodation rates to an increase in the amount of funds we've provided for the care side of long-term care – I don't know the exact figure, but I think that combined, long-term care operators have received increased funding in the range of 12 to 15 per cent to try and catch up on some of those issues. Of course, they've had issues around shortage of human resources, competing with private industry, that could pay a lot more for those kinds of positions.

I happen to think, hon. member, that there's always some good that comes out of tough times. I think we're going to have an opportunity as we move forward in the next year to have the ability to catch up on some of these human resource issues. We're going to have a situation where there are going to be job losses in this province. The one area where there probably aren't going to be job losses and there are still going to be opportunities is in health care, so I think we've got a great opportunity to start to fill some of those roles.

I've mentioned before in some of my comments that the college of registered nurses told me in my office one day that on average 35 per cent of a nurse's day is spent doing non-nurse stuff. Well, I'm afraid it's non-nurse stuff at the low end of their training, not at the high end. If we can start to shift and fill that lower end, get an appropriate number of aides, then move the chain up so that we've got the appropriate number of LPNs so that they are doing that 35 per cent of a nurse's work, that nurse can take that 35 per cent and actually do things that the physician can start to hive off, moving everything up and actually having professions practising to the full scope of their profession. Actually, I don't believe that there's a nurse in this province that that 35 per cent of what she or he is doing is giving any satisfaction to. They want to be doing what they're trained to do.

We have an opportunity in long-term care, in assisted daily living, in all of our provision of services to our senior patients to integrate, as I said earlier to the Leader of the Opposition, to start to have health care in Alberta, deliver health care to the patient and not have the patient have to fit the system every time.

With those, I'll take my seat.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I am pleased that the hon. minister recognizes that integrating health teams is going to lead to greater efficiency. That's extremely important. I'm also pleased that the minister acknowledges that there has been a difficulty in communications with the restructuring. I want to toss out a bouquet to a lady by the name of Lynn Redford, who was the government relations contact for the Calgary health region. Lynn did a tremendous job. If you called her, within the hour she would be back and giving you the information and who you needed to call.

5:50

One of the areas I hope the minister can potentially give me an answer to is guaranteeing the transference and the equivalence of care. For example, a child in Medicine Hat suffering from severe autism moves to Red Deer, but there are different hours of care provided in Red Deer than they were receiving in Medicine Hat. Is this something, hopefully, that's going to be resolved?

Then if the minister could please give me an update on the progress, if there is progress, on the Tom Baker cancer centre, if that's moving forward. I would appreciate it.

Mr. Liepert: I'll start with the last comment. I can't comment relative to capital because we're in the process of bringing forward our capital plan, and it's tied into the budget. I just can't get into the capital plan at this stage.

Relative to the level of care, I guess one of the things that convinced me that we had these artificial borders between regions and there was clearly a differentiation between the care you received in some cases if you lived on this side of the road versus that side of the road – ideally, we should be striving for a system that provides equitable care across the province. It's never going to be the same in Edmonton as it is in La Crête, but we need to ensure that folks in La Crête and other communities have equitable access to care. It's obviously becoming a greater challenge. We have to take into account that professionals are individuals who can choose to locate where they want. I think that municipalities have to take a bigger role in making it convenient for professionals to locate in their community.

I answered questions at the AUMA forum, and I had someone from one of the municipalities say: what are you going to do to get a doctor in my town? So I said: what are you doing to get a doctor in your town? Because this is all of our responsibility. It's not up to us as government to provide doctors in every community, but it is very much up to that community to say: what can we do to ensure that we have an attractive place for physicians?

Many of these are physicians from out of country. In fact, we've got a couple of pilots going on right now where a physician comes from another country and they almost, if you might, have their hand held for the first six months to ensure that if there's a language issue, that's dealt with, that they have a familiarity with the community they're going to. Because, quite frankly, up until now, or still today, someone lands in this province and they're sent to a small community, and not only is it a new community to them, but it's a new country and in many cases a new language.

These are the kinds of things we simply have to do better to ensure that we are offering equitable care across the province.

The Deputy Chair: Anyone else wish to speak?

Mr. Chase: I realize, Mr. Minister, that you can't talk about the costs associated with the Tom Baker cancer centre. Can you give us any hopes as to the concept? Is it still within the drawing board or the planning board? That's what I'm looking for. I'm not looking for a dollar commitment. I'm just looking for a commitment to a cancer treatment centre expansion in Calgary.

Mr. Liepert: I just simply can't respond to that right now, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Certainly, there are very interesting discussions going on here regarding health care. But whenever we are having a look at this interim supply budget, the questions still remain of how we compare this year with last and how we are going to manage with reduced revenue. Again, I'm looking at this request, Mr. Chairman.

**Vote on Interim Supply Estimates 2009-10
General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund**

The Deputy Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) and Government Motion 8, agreed to on March 2, 2009, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions relating to the 2009-2010 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, general revenue fund, and the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, please say aye.

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Chair: Opposed, please say no.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Deputy Chair: That motion is carried.

Pursuant to the standing order the committee now rises and reports.

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'm sorry. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. [interjections]

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think I could follow that act with any humour whatsoever, whether it was in yellow or pink or any colour on the page.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

All resolutions relating to the 2009-2010 interim supply estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, the general revenue fund, and the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, have been approved.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$29,300,000; office of the Auditor General, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$7,100,000; office of the Ombudsman, expense, \$900,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,800,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, expense, \$300,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,500,000.

Aboriginal Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$14,100,000.

Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$744,300,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$34,900,000.

Agriculture and Rural Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$190,200,000.

Children and Youth Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$284,100,000.

Culture and Community Spirit: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$97,200,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$300,000.

Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,142,900,000.

Employment and Immigration: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$255,800,000.

Energy: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$133,800,000.

Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$63,000,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$9,000,000.

Finance and Enterprise: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$94,200,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$11,000,000.

Health and Wellness: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$3,238,000,000; capital investment, \$4,800,000.

Housing and Urban Affairs: expense, \$133,100,000.

Infrastructure: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$157,300,000; capital investment, \$159,300,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$10,700,000.

Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$135,100,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$588,100,000.

Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$640,900,000.

6:00

Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$91,500,000; capital investment, \$23,200,000.

Solicitor General and Public Security: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$128,500,000; capital investment, \$8,800,000; lottery fund payments, \$409,400,000.

Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$109,600,000; capital investment, \$10,000,000.

Tourism, Parks and Recreation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$103,600,000; capital investment, \$4,400,000.

Transportation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$590,600,000; capital investment, \$370,600,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,700,000.

Treasury Board: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$16,900,000.

Thank you.

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. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that we have no time left on the clock, I move that we now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:01 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Chair: Mrs. Forsyth

Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

Blakeman Campbell	DeLong Denis	Johnston Kang	Vacant
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Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen

Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr

Benito Bhardwaj Chase	Johnson Johnston	Lukaszuk Notley	Rodney Sarich
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Standing Committee on the Economy

Chair: Mr. Campbell

Deputy Chair: Mr. Taylor

Allred Amery Bhullar	Marz McFarland	Taft Weadick	Xiao Vacant
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Standing Committee on Health

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Dallas Denis Fawcett	Notley Olson	Quest Sherman	Taft Vandermeer
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Standing Committee on Private Bills

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Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw

Allred Amery Anderson Benito Bhardwaj	Boutilier Calahasen Dallas Doerksen Forsyth	Jacobs MacDonald McQueen Olson Quest	Rodney Sandhu Sarich Taft
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock

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Anderson Brown Calahasen	Cao Jacobs	MacDonald Sandhu	Woo-Paw Vacant
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