



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fourth Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, February 28, 2011

Issue 5e

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature**

Fourth Session

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

Ady, Hon. Cindy, Calgary-Shaw (PC)	Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (AL)
Allred, Ken, St. Albert (PC)	Klimchuk, Hon. Heather, Edmonton-Glenora (PC)
Amery, Moe, Calgary-East (PC)	Knight, Hon. Mel, Grande Prairie-Smoky (PC)
Anderson, Rob, Airdrie-Chestermere (WA), WA Opposition House Leader	Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)	Liepert, Hon. Ron, Calgary-West (PC)
Berger, Evan, Livingstone-Macleod (PC)	Lindsay, Fred, Stony Plain (PC)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)	Lukaszuk, Hon. Thomas A., Edmonton-Castle Downs (PC), Deputy Government House Leader
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Montrose (PC)	Lund, Ty, Rocky Mountain House (PC)
Blackett, Hon. Lindsay, Calgary-North West (PC)	MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (AL)
Blakeman, Laurie, Edmonton-Centre (AL), Official Opposition Deputy Leader, Official Opposition House Leader	Marz, Richard, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (PC)
Boutillier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (WA)	Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Leader of the ND Opposition
Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Nose Hill (PC)	McFarland, Barry, Little Bow (PC)
Calahasen, Pearl, Lesser Slave Lake (PC)	McQueen, Diana, Drayton Valley-Calmar (PC)
Campbell, Robin, West Yellowhead (PC), Government Whip	Morton, F.L., Foothills-Rocky View (PC)
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL), Official Opposition Whip	Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), ND Opposition House Leader
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)	Oberle, Hon. Frank, Peace River (PC)
Danyluk, Hon. Ray, Lac La Biche-St. Paul (PC)	Olson, Hon. Verlyn, QC, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (PC), Deputy Government House Leader
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)	Ouellette, Hon. Luke, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (PC)
Denis, Hon. Jonathan, QC, Calgary-Egmont (PC), Deputy Government House Leader	Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (AL), Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Doerksen, Arno, Strathmore-Brooks (PC), Deputy Government Whip	Prins, Ray, Lacombe-Ponoka (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)	Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Elniski, Doug, Edmonton-Calder (PC)	Redford, Alison M., QC, Calgary-Elbow (PC)
Evans, Hon. Iris, Sherwood Park (PC)	Renner, Hon. Rob, Medicine Hat (PC), Deputy Government House Leader
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (WA), WA Opposition Whip	Rogers, George, Leduc-Beaumont-Devon (PC)
Fritz, Hon. Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)	Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Goudreau, Hon. Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace (PC)	Sarich, Janice, Edmonton-Decore (PC)
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC)	Sherman, Dr. Raj, Edmonton-Meadowlark (Ind)
Groeneveld, George, Highwood (PC)	Snelgrove, Hon. Lloyd, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC)
Hancock, Hon. Dave, QC, Edmonton-Whitemud (PC), Government House Leader	Stelmach, Hon. Ed, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (PC), Premier
Hayden, Hon. Jack, Drumheller-Stettler (PC)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL), Leader of the Official Opposition
Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)	Taft, Dr. Kevin, Edmonton-Riverview (AL)
Hinman, Paul, Calgary-Glenmore (WA), WA Opposition Deputy Leader	Tarchuk, Janis, Banff-Cochrane (PC)
Horne, Fred, Edmonton-Rutherford (PC)	Taylor, Dave, Calgary-Currie (AB)
Horner, Doug, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert (PC)	VanderBurg, George, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne (PC)
Jablonski, Hon. Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC)	Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)	Weadick, Hon. Greg, Lethbridge-West (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)	Webber, Hon. Len, Calgary-Foothills (PC)
Johnston, Art, Calgary-Hays (PC)	Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)
	Xiao, David H., Edmonton-McClung (PC)
	Zwozdesky, Hon. Gene, Edmonton-Mill Creek (PC), Deputy Government House Leader

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Clerk	W.J. David McNeil	Parliamentary Counsel	Stephanie LeBlanc
Law Clerk/Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Sergeant-at-Arms	Brian G. Hodgson
Senior Parliamentary Counsel/ Director of House Services	Shannon Dean	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	Chris Caughell
Manager – House Proceedings	Micheline S. Gravel	Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms	Gordon H. Munk
		Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>	Liz Sim

Party standings:

Progressive Conservative: 67 Alberta Liberal: 8 Wildrose Alliance: 4 New Democrat: 2 Alberta: 1 Independent: 1

Executive Council

Ed Stelmach	Premier, President of Executive Council, Chair of Agenda and Priorities Committee, Vice-chair of Treasury Board, Liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces
Lloyd Snelgrove	President of the Treasury Board, Minister of Finance and Enterprise
Dave Hancock	Minister of Education, Political Minister for Edmonton
Iris Evans	Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Mel Knight	Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Luke Ouellette	Minister of Transportation
Rob Renner	Minister of Environment
Verlyn Olson	Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Yvonne Fritz	Minister of Children and Youth Services, Political Minister for Calgary
Jack Hayden	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Political Minister for Rural Alberta
Ray Danyluk	Minister of Infrastructure
Gene Zwozdesky	Minister of Health and Wellness
Ron Liepert	Minister of Energy
Mary Anne Jablonski	Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
Len Webber	Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Heather Klimchuk	Minister of Service Alberta
Lindsay Blackett	Minister of Culture and Community Spirit
Cindy Ady	Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Hector Goudreau	Minister of Municipal Affairs
Frank Oberle	Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security
Jonathan Denis	Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs
Thomas Lukaszuk	Minister of Employment and Immigration
Greg Weadick	Minister of Advanced Education and Technology

Parliamentary Assistants

Evan Berger	Sustainable Resource Development
Manmeet Singh Bhullar	Municipal Affairs
Cal Dallas	Finance and Enterprise
Fred Horne	Health and Wellness
Broyce Jacobs	Agriculture and Rural Development
Jeff Johnson	Treasury Board (Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat)
Diana McQueen	Energy
Janice Sarich	Education
Teresa Woo-Paw	Employment and Immigration

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Tarchuk
Deputy Chair: Mr. Elniski

DeLong
Forsyth
Groeneveld
Johnston
MacDonald
Quest
Taft

Standing Committee on Community Services

Chair: Mr. Doerksen
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hehr

Allred
Anderson
Benito
Bhullar
Chase
Johnston
Notley
Rodney
Sarich
Taylor

Standing Committee on the Economy

Chair: Mr. Bhardwaj
Deputy Chair: Mr. Chase

Amery
Dallas
Fawcett
Hinman
Johnson
Lund
Taft
Tarchuk
Taylor
Woo-Paw

Standing Committee on Health

Chair: Mr. McFarland
Deputy Chair: Ms Pastoor

Forsyth
Griffiths
Groeneveld
Horne
Lindsay
Notley
Quest
Sherman
Swann
Vandermeer

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

Bhullar
Blakeman
Campbell
Hinman
Lindsay
MacDonald
Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Kowalski
Deputy Chair: Mr. Campbell

Amery
Anderson
Bhullar
Elniski
Hehr
Leskiw
Mason
Pastoor
Rogers
VanderBurg

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Dr. Brown
Deputy Chair: Ms Woo-Paw

Allred Kang
Benito Lindsay
Boutilier McQueen
Calahasen Morton
Dallas Redford
Doerksen Sandhu
Drysdale Sarich
Hinman Taft
Horner Xiao
Jacobs

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Mr. Hancock

Amery Lindsay
Berger McFarland
Calahasen Mitzel
DeLong Notley
Doerksen Pastoor
Forsyth Quest
Groeneveld Sherman
Hinman Tarchuk
Jacobs Taylor
Leskiw

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. MacDonald
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rodney

Allred Griffiths
Anderson Groeneveld
Benito Kang
Calahasen Mason
Chase Sandhu
Dallas Vandermeer
Elniski Xiao
Fawcett

Standing Committee on Public Safety and Services

Chair: Mr. Drysdale
Deputy Chair: Mr. Kang

Boutilier
Brown
Calahasen
Cao
Forsyth
Johnson
MacDonald
Rogers
Sandhu
Xiao

Standing Committee on Resources and Environment

Chair: Mr. Prins
Deputy Chair: Ms Blakeman

Anderson
Berger
Boutilier
Hehr
Jacobs
Marz
Mason
McQueen
Mitzel
VanderBurg

Select Special Ombudsman Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Mitzel
Deputy Chair: Mr. Lund

Blakeman
Hinman
Lindsay
Marz
Notley
Quest
Rogers

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, February 28, 2011

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

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

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2010-11 General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance and Enterprise.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move the 2010-11 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund. These estimates will provide additional spending authority to 13 government departments. When passed, the estimates will authorize increases of about \$638.7 million in voted expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$0.4 million in voted capital investments, and \$124.3 million in voted nonbudgetary disbursements. The estimates will also authorize, when passed, the transfer of approximately \$25.1 million of the previously approved spending authority between departments. These estimates are consistent with the third-quarter fiscal updates, which are included in the 2010-11 fiscal plan for all government entities.

The estimates will authorize increases for the departments of Aboriginal Relations, Advanced Education and Technology, Children and Youth Services, Culture and Community Spirit, Employment and Immigration, Environment, Infrastructure, Justice, Municipal Affairs, Seniors and Community Supports, Service Alberta, Sustainable Resource Development, and Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Finally, the estimates will also authorize a transfer from the Department of Treasury Board to the departments of the Solicitor General and Public Security. The ministers or their designates that are responsible for these departments will be happy to answer any questions from any members of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: Before we begin, I'd like to just mention that according to Standing Order 59.02 members may speak more than once. However, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time, and the minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they plan on combining their time with the minister's time, both taking and yielding the floor over the combined period.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Aboriginal Relations

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to participate in the debate this evening on supplementary supply. I must say that I had, for the record, the pleasure of attending the minister of finance and President of the Treasury Board's speech earlier today.

The Deputy Chair: Will you be combining the time, hon. member?

Mr. MacDonald: We could certainly ask a question and get a reply from the hon. minister and proceed that way. I think that's

worked in the past with this hon. gentleman, and I'm confident it would work tonight.

Mr. Snelgrove: Could I just ask the hon. member: would he be following the list of departments as outlined in the supply, or do you intend to start with Aboriginal Relations and work down? Is that the understanding?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Sure.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. We got that settled, and we got it settled quite quickly. I would just like to say to the hon. minister before I get started that that was a nice speech he gave today, but I was struck by the fact of his predecessor Steve West, a former very influential cabinet minister on the Conservative side. I was sitting there listening to your remarks, wondering how Dr. West would feel with four successive budget deficits, totalling close to \$10 billion, and the fact that this year it is \$3.4 billion. Last year it was anticipated that it would only be a little bit more than \$1 billion. I was sitting there, I was listening to your speech, and I was wondering, "What would Steve think?" with you being from the same end of the province as he and having had the privilege and honour of representing the same constituency as he.

Now, we could perhaps get right to the point, Mr. Chairman, about Aboriginal Relations. The supplementary amount here is for over \$32 million, which is net of the \$8 million that was budgeted spending in the First Nations development fund and in other program areas as requested. The ministry's 2009-10 annual report, page 16, noted progress on the Bigstone treaty land entitlement claim, and it indicated ratification in 2010-11. Can the minister please explain how this settlement compares to a land entitlement claim among the 15 that are reported to have been settled, also in the annual report on page 15? Given that there are still 30 claims to be settled, can the minister explain the process that is used in Aboriginal Relations to plan for the significant sums that may be expected to be involved in the settlements that are still outstanding? If the minister could respond, I would appreciate it.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, are you directing those questions to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations?

Mr. MacDonald: Sure.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Fine. Thank you.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Webber: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, hon. member, for the questions. If you enjoyed the speech this morning by the hon. minister over here, you're going to really enjoy my speech here tonight.

I'll start off by saying that you may be aware that for many years Canada, Alberta, and the Bigstone Cree Nation have been negotiating Bigstone's claim to a remaining land entitlement under Treaty 8. Last year Canada, Alberta, and the Bigstone Nation, as you know, finalized the largest treaty land entitlement claim in Alberta, and it includes the communities of Peerless Lake, Trout Lake, Chipewyan Lake, and Calling Lake.

Now, the Canada-Alberta agreement for the Bigstone land claim was approved by our cabinet on July 13, 2010, and the federal minister of Indian and northern affairs signed off on the settlement agreements on December 13 of that same year. This is an historic

land claim settlement but not the first one for Alberta. In fact, there have been a dozen land claims settled in Alberta since 1986.

As part of the Bigstone settlement agreement, Alberta agreed to provide 140,000 acres of provincial Crown land, including mines and minerals, and also \$41 million, comprised of \$29 million in monies plus \$12 million to construct two new elementary schools for the Peerless and Trout Lake First Nations. With cabinet's approval \$41 million was added to our budget for the 2010-2011 year, and this entire cost was reported by Aboriginal Relations although \$12 million came from Alberta Infrastructure, and it was accrued for the future construction of the two new on-reserve schools. As a result we are here today requesting the supplementary funds that have been committed by cabinet.

Cabinet approved the \$41 million in supplementary funds that, based on our forecasts, we needed to add to our 2010-2011 budget for the Bigstone land claim. I am pleased to say that my ministry, Aboriginal Relations, has been able to offset \$8.425 million of this amount from our department budget due to the cost savings and expense reductions in 2010-2011, and as a result I'm here today requesting \$32.575 million. This is the balance of the funding approved by cabinet and already disbursed as part of Alberta's land claim settlement.

Thank you. That's my speech, hon. member.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. I appreciate very much that explanation.

Advanced Education and Technology

Mr. MacDonald: Now, alphabetically we are looking at a request from the Department of Advanced Education and Technology for a total that is \$24 million for equipment and inventory purchases and nonbudgetary disbursements of \$53 million.

7:40

Before we get to the details of this, I would like to direct a question, please, to the finance minister regarding operating expenses. If any of the money that we are discussing tonight, in excess of \$630 million, is going to be transferred for operating expenses, how much of that is being transferred for operating expenses and precisely from which budgets?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. The operating expense piece of this is actually student finance, and it's related to student loans. We don't turn any students away, so when students that are able to do apply for loans to attend postsecondaries, the funding flows through to them. This year we've been extremely successful in getting young people to attend our postsecondary institutions, and \$53.9 million of this will go to support those student loans for these young people. The balance of the funding is for the completion of construction on the Edmonton clinic north. This is a wonderful project at the University of Alberta. It involves both teaching and clinical facilities. This project was actually due to be funded next year, but because construction is ahead of schedule, moving this funding forward will allow us to complete the project a little bit ahead of schedule and keep everything moving. So both very positive stories.

That's what the funding out of this pot of monies will go towards: student loans on one side, which will help our young people to continue with their education, and completing the construction on the Edmonton clinic north at the U of A campus.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Alberta has only 14 per cent postsecondary student participation, yet what we see is a significant increase in loans available to students, which in turn puts them farther into debt. Can you explain the rationale as to why the emphasis on loans, which lead to greater debt build-up, rather than an emphasis on bursaries and grants, which incent students to be involved in the system?

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Member. That's actually a very good question. Last year we did make the fundamental change of moving some of our bursary and grant money into our loans portfolio. This allows more students access to funding because a grant is given once and is gone – it becomes part of the investment – but a student loan is repayable, so it allows that we can expend significantly more funds in support of our students as loans rather than as bursaries or grants.

With the number of students entering the postsecondaries and needing support and the students coming to us and asking if we would increase loan limits so that they can live and make sure they can cover their costs during school, we have increased that, and that's driven up the cost of the loans that the students need. We'd all love to see our students carrying a little bit less debt. Don't forget that we do have programs in place. For students that are carrying debt that they can't carry, we have some loan remission programs available as well. Those programs will help as well.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. With regard to the percentage of increase in loans is there an equal percentage in terms of remissions or forgiveness of debt? Is there a balance there?

Mr. Weadick: Remissions are done based on need. There's a basic remission that happens. Anyone that graduates or completes their program can apply for remission of a portion of their debt.

But then there's also remission for needy cases, where people show where they're working, their cost of living, that they simply can't make their loan payments, and then we work with them for further managing of that debt so that they can survive. We have a number of different programs to provide for remission and make sure that students are not overburdened in this program.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Another concern I have is, as you mentioned, the cost-of-living effect on students. A big factor is housing. Can we expect any time soon – I didn't see it reflected in this budget – a greater emphasis on providing university on-campus housing? Eastern universities are usually in the 21 per cent. I realize that in Calgary there has been an increase in housing. I think we'll be up to 13 per cent. At U of A it's approximately 11 per cent, with some small increases, but we're nowhere near the affordable housing that we see in eastern universities.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you very much. We are seeing some increased investment in housing. In fact, through the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs we've seen money invested through our municipalities into a number of housing projects on campuses. We're also seeing campuses investing in projects, P3s, to help develop student housing, but a lot of the communities have rallied as well. You'll see suites being made available within the cities

where our colleges and universities and polytechnics are that allow students the opportunity for housing off campus as well.

Ideally, you'd like to have enough on campus for all of your first-year students so that students coming in would have that opportunity at least in their first year to have housing. That's generally why we look at that number of 20 to 25 per cent as being a really good point. Most of our schools haven't got there yet, but we continue to work with them to try to develop a program so that we can get our housing closer to that number.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I was very appreciative of your presentation at Bow Valley College. I see that both Bow Valley and SAIT on their individual campuses have had increases in student seats. The University of Calgary did not have that same increase. They did take over the 8th and 8th clinic. Again, appreciated space, but the whole idea of Campus Alberta and then the idea of an urban campus seems to have been somewhat put on hold. I don't see reflected in this supplementary budget any kind of attempt to bring more students downtown into sort of centralized locations where LRT is available. Again, it's a cost-cutting concern as well as the transferability. As you noted, courses from Lethbridge are being offered now at Bow Valley. It's a convenience thing as well.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. Excellent question. We are very cognizant of the need for housing in the urban areas, and the major project under construction right now is phase 2 of Bow Valley College, which is a \$200 million construction project in the heart of downtown, where the old courthouse was in Calgary. This project will allow more students to access programming in the heart of the city in Calgary. It will also allow combined degree granting, with Athabasca, the University of Lethbridge, Olds College, and Bow Valley working together so that young people may be taking U of L courses in a Bow Valley College laboratory and those kinds of co-operative, collaborative things, which will allow students availability to the centre of the city, where LRT can get, to be able to take studies there. We believe in that as well, and that's why the redevelopment of many of your campuses in this area.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In the original urban campus concept the idea was to bring students from the university, from SAIT. There was the potential of a shared facility, a shared cafeteria with ACAD. There was also discussion of dormitories. Is any type of student housing project part of that \$200 million, or is it strictly seats without accommodations?

Mr. Weadick: That particular project is seats, classroom facilities for the college at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions for the Minister of Advanced Ed and Technology? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. I was curious when I asked my initial question regarding the in-year operating expense limits that the Fiscal Responsibility Act certainly directs that 1 per cent of total budgeted ministry operating expenses are not to be exceeded. So the student loan portion of this request or this estimate is not included in an operating expense, correct?

Mr. Weadick: It's nonbudgeted.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Now, when you have this request for – and I'm looking at the third-quarter update, where it's necessary to have a \$102 million increase, including \$75 million for student loans. Of course, the \$27 million is to accelerate funding for the Edmonton clinic north. I thought the money originally for the Edmonton clinic north was refiled from somewhere else, and I should have noted this, I suppose. But when you look at the \$75 million for student loans, how does that request compare with what you're planning for the 2011-12 year and for the following two years?

7:50

Mr. Weadick: I believe that item will be for debate when we talk about the overall budget. But for this year, we never turn students away that come and apply for loans, so it's very hard to budget. You try to estimate the number of students. Approximately 30 per cent of our students will get loans, so we budget initially, but if more students take access to the loans, then we come back to supplementary supply. Most years there's a supplementary supply involved in the student loan portfolio to ensure that all of the students that have applied during the year can access that funding.

Mr. Hehr: Just to follow up that question, is any student who is selected for a postsecondary opportunity at one of our institutions here in Alberta guaranteed a loan? Could you just clarify that point for me?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you very much. There is a process of application. You have to meet certain criteria, but any student that meets those criteria will get their loan. We don't turn anyone away once they've met the criteria for a student loan.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. To the same minister?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Now, could you please tell me, hon. minister, when we top this up – and we say that with sincerity – the \$75 million for student loans, what will that bring the total to for this forecast year? Will it be \$260 million in total that will be accessible for those who are requesting a loan?

Mr. Weadick: The actual new number is \$53.9 million in supplementary supply for student loans for this year to bring the total to that.

Mr. MacDonald: To clarify, that's for this year ending March 31?

Mr. Weadick: That's correct.

Mr. MacDonald: Okay. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to the same minister.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. You know where I stand on loans, but there's an inequality in terms of accessing loans. Is there any plan to not take into account a university student's parents' economic well-being when determining a loan? When a student goes off to university, that's the potential start of their independent life, but tying it back to their parents is rather unfair, especially if the students are estranged or are trying to make that break. I'm just wondering if there's any plan to change that policy to be fair to all students as opposed to looking at their parents' bank accounts.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you. At this point the policy stands with respect to how we gauge a student's need, and parental support is still a portion of that. I know that not all people would support that. I think we'll probably debate that more with the business plan; however, that is one of the considerations that we use when we go forward. It is part of our deciding how loans are given, and at this point we're not looking at changing that.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to the same minister.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my understanding that right now in Alberta we have the fewest number of postsecondary people in the system, at 14 per cent. I'm also of the opinion that we have the fewest people applying for or then getting student loans. If that is correct, I'm just wondering: have you looked at the student loan guidelines, where there are things we could maybe do to increase the eligibility of people who receive these loans, to get more students going? Like the car requirement – anyone who has a car, I'm of the understanding, can't get a loan – the limits for part-time jobs and full-time studies: is there any way of removing those restrictions to allow for more people to get into the system, to allow for more loans so that we can have more people go to school?

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, hon. member. You know, those are all excellent suggestions. I think that together our goal is to try to get as many young people into the system as possible. You're right. One of those can be: how affordable is it? We base all of our decisions on transferability. Can a student easily move through the system from facility to facility? Is it affordable? And that's not just, "Is a loan available?" because only 30 per cent of our students take out loans, but: "Are there grants and bursaries? Are there scholarships?" What are our tuition fees and that as well across the system? Can we try to find a system that at least provides affordability to the young people that are trying to access it? Very good points that there may be things that we could look at over time in how we provide support to students that could bring more of our low-income students into the system.

Mr. Hehr: While I have you, is every university space virtually filled up here in Alberta?

Mr. Weadick: You know, we've been very fortunate that many, many of our institutions are at their capacity this year. Some institutions, in fact, took in more students than they had capacity for to try to provide as much education as possible, but still some programs remain unfilled for specific types of programming.

In some of our trades we require more people within the trades, but part of the challenge there can be having the journeymen that can provide the support, the companies that will hire those tradespeople. A recent change to allow in many fields one journeyman to mentor two apprentices may go a long way to alleviating some of that pressure. Really, there's the education portion, but there's also the other portions within the community like employment in the trades and journeymen to mentor the young apprentices that are really required as well to make the picture whole.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I understand much of this is policy decisions: if you open up greater amounts in university, fewer go to SAIT or vice versa. But it seems to me that there has to be some recognition in future budgeting, even whether any money was committed

in this sup supply, to increasing overall postsecondary rates in this province. Do you have a mandate to do so, being a new minister?

Mr. Weadick: Yes. That is one of our primary goals: to increase high school completion at all levels, especially in our First Nations areas, to then allow those young people that have completed to move into postsecondary in a variety of areas. So, yes, expanding postsecondary; we've continued to increase postsecondary.

Over the past six years we increased funding by 42 per cent to all of our postsecondary institutions to create extra capacity in the province as we were growing and expanding our workforce. The last year or two of very tough budgeting has put a bit of restraint in there, which was absolutely required, but we're starting to see pressure again for workers, for workforce people to come in and start to provide employment, so we're going to have to continue to develop those spaces and train the much-needed workforce that we have.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to the same minister.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. With regard to housing affordability for students I talked about on campus because then it cuts down on transportation and so on. With the subsidies for low-income individuals the idea is that they should not be spending more than 30 per cent of their income on a roof. Is there any such consideration for students in terms of looking at their T4 slips for the year previous and so on in terms of deciding on potential rent subsidies for students so that they can afford to go to school?

Mr. Weadick: I believe that any application for subsistence allowance would be through the Department of Employment and Immigration, and there are some subsistence allowances available. Also, through some of the housing organizations there may be housing available for subsidy to some students but not through Advanced Education.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. I've been thinking about the response you have provided to us regarding the Edmonton clinic north, and I have this question, if you don't mind, please: why not integrate the payments for the Edmonton clinic north into the 2011-12 allocation for postsecondary infrastructure rather than requesting it through a supplementary amount as we are doing this evening?

Mr. Weadick: Actually, we have a small portion of the funding still available through our Advanced Education and Technology budget this year, so we've applied that to this amount and then asked for supplementary supply to complete the project.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

8:00

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you. How much was that amount that was reprofiled?

Mr. Weadick: The requirement for next year would have been \$32.5 million. We're requesting \$24.4 million, and the balance has been taken out of this year's.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions for the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology?

Children and Youth Services

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When I first heard the budget pronounced and then I look at sup supplies, it seems to me that we're almost back to 2009 in terms of what was cut out last year. We've sort of put it back after a fashion in sup supply, but I'm very concerned. For example, this ministry cut nearly \$27 million from child intervention with the original budget. Now it needs an increase of \$40 million just to make it through to the end of the year. My feeling is that with overly deep cuts one year and then compensating the following year, there's a lag time of a year when children aren't getting the services they need in a sustainable fashion. I don't understand this sort of Peter-Paul approach, particularly with regard to child intervention.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's actually a very good question. I thought you'd be very pleased when you saw the estimates for child intervention. You're correct. There was a \$27 million reduction in the previous budget, and then throughout the year that has been replaced and more, which is good news. It is due to caseload increase. It's due to volume. It's due to the priority that the government has put in this ministry on child intervention services. I think your question was: have we decreased services in any way throughout the year? The answer is no. In fact, we are increasing services and increasing them significantly because this is significant dollars. It's good news.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. You're not going to hear me ever criticize the ministry for increasing funding, especially for child intervention services, but the point I'm making is that we need sustainable funding, and that funding should not be subject to subtraction. It should reflect the growth. We're very aware, for example, of First Nations. We know that, unfortunately, almost 70 per cent of child intervention is going to involve First Nations. It's costly in terms of money, and it's costly in terms of emotion and the separation of moving a child from the north to the south. Can you give me a sense of how many or maybe a percentage increase in the number of caseworkers to reduce the ever-growing caseloads?

Mrs. Fritz: I can't give you an exact percentage of the number of caseworkers that have increased. I know that our front-line workers have not been – the hiring has not been stopped in any way. There's been no freeze on hiring of front-line workers, and you know that from previous questions that we've had in the Assembly in that regard. But I can tell you that this was very carefully thought out, that the increase that you see from the \$27 million to the \$40 million, the \$13 million, was due to what we know from experience and research, what our caseload increase is and what our volume increase is overall.

We projected a significant increase in intakes, and that was by 6 per cent over the 12-month period, and we're also seeing an increase in permanency for our children, the permanency programming, which is good, and that's about 12 per cent. So the monthly average: there are about 3,200 children that receive our supports for permanency, and that's through our child and family

service authorities and through our delegated First Nations agencies, which I know you have a keen interest in.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. A trend I've noticed over the last number of years is a greater amount of contracting out. Now, I understand, if we're just talking from a fiscal point of view, that the farther along the line of the contracting out of a service, the less expensive it is, but I'm wondering if that's fair to children. Is it fair, for example, that a social worker out of university, working directly under the umbrella of the government, receives \$65,000 for the services that they provide whereas a person on a contracted-out basis, same education and same experience, has a \$35,000 increase? In terms of fairness to the workforce and the quality of service provided to children based on caseload, is this an acceptable way to do our accounting?

Mrs. Fritz: The child and family services authority does have, as I indicated to you, front-line workers with our caseworkers and our caregivers overall, and they work closely with our agencies. Yes, there are contracts through the child and family services authorities with the agencies, but they work hand in hand. This increase overall really is about supporting as they go back to the increase in caseload and the volume increase and to create greater permanency for our children that are in care. So that means, then, that we find permanent homes for children by committing this financial support and other services to private guardians and adoptive parents after they assume guardianship. But it works hand in hand, contracting out and the permanent staff through the CFSAs.

Mr. Chase: In terms of costs has there been an analysis done in terms of preparing the supplementary budget as to how much it costs to keep a child within their home with a little extra support for the parents, possibly some food subsidies and so on, as opposed to the costs of legal intervention, of foster care provision, the whole process of taking a child out of a circumstance that with a little bit more support could possibly retain them? Have there been any studies or algorithms or looking at what it costs to keep a child in a secure home versus taking them out even on a temporary basis with the hope of returning them?

Mrs. Fritz: I can say to you, through the chair, that we have had 12,269 children and youth that were receiving our child intervention services between April to December of 2010, and 7,129 were aboriginal; 2,500 of those children and youth received family enhancement services, and 37 per cent were aboriginal.

The reason why I want you to be clear about those numbers is related to your question. Every child is unique, and every need they have – it just relates totally to that child. I can tell you that with all the different cases that I have seen, whether we provide respite care to assist the parents, whether it's training, you know, education and whatnot to assist the child, whether it's the cost of recreation, the overall cost of living: every single one is a unique cost. Do we have a defined average, that we're only going to fund to that average? The answer is no. It's based on what we know overall in the budget, what the demand is.

An area that I know you're interested in is the increase in autism, for example, family supports for the children with disabilities area as well. You saw that increase here, and that, too, is all because of the unique needs of the child.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I thoroughly understand what's in the "best interest of the child," and I realize that every child is unique, and we have to develop programs that recognize their uniqueness. Having been a teacher for 34 years, I know that the composition of your class, like the composition of a caseload, can make a great difference to the expectations. But when these children are in crisis, is there at least a potential upper limit for what is considered a manageable caseload so that a person is able to actually work towards, if at all possible, reintegrating the child with their family? Have you set maximums for caseloads?

Mrs. Fritz: Each child and family services authority in their own local regions, their jurisdictions, know the needs of the children in the area, and they also know the capacity for the worker. Depending on who that family and that child or those children within that home are with, as the worker you would look at what is needed for intense supports for various children and their critical needs. Some are very medically fragile children, and they have very, very high needs. That means that for the caseworker, too, they may be only able to handle five cases.

8:10

Other areas may be families that are siblings that are together, that are a family that are able to participate overall in the community as a whole without, you know, very many needs at all medically, for example. When I talk about medically fragile, some are very medically fragile; some may not have those needs. That caseworker may be able to handle 15 cases. Some may be able to handle 20.

It's just entirely up to what the volume is, based on, as you said, the complexities of the cases and the experience of the worker. There are many factors. It's very complex in how that is put in place. It's not based on just a formula.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I realize that formulaic approaches to human beings are not a particularly practical way of solving problems.

One of the circumstances that I've encountered is the number of court appearances that caseworkers have to undergo. Obviously, while they're in court – and court appearances can be delayed and rebooked and rescheduled and take up a tremendous amount of a caseworker's time – they're not being able to deal with the other cases. How does the system distribute that workload so that when, say, a caseworker is in court, the needs of the other children are being dealt with? Is there sort of a substitute circumstance within Children and Youth Services that avoids lengthy waits due to court procedures?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the offices that I've been to – and there have been many – the front-line workers gather in the mornings with their caseloads. They have a board, and they list on the board what that worker has for activity during the day, and they distribute that work. I would think that if court takes up a lot of time for a caseworker, if that's the case, if that's a truism, then another caseworker would assist with the handling of the calls that may come in regarding any family. But the worker does manage their own caseload, and if they need assistance, they have other people that can assist them, whether it's their supervisors or whomever, in the field along with them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Does the age of a child determine the potential reunification and speed? Like, if a mother is judged to be capable and she has left a disputing partner, or it could be a father who has left a mother where, you know, there was antagonism in the household – without going into names or anything, I've recently been involved in Calgary in a case of a two-month-old child. Part of the child's nourishment came from breastfeeding, but the child is also on formula, so it isn't an absolute necessity. When the child was taken away by Children and Youth Services, the mother was taken to the remand centre for a couple of unpaid LRT tickets. She's still working. She's in a new home, new situation, no longer with the individual that caused the ruckus.

I'm using this as an example. When there is that youth and the bonding with the mother is so crucial, is there a fast-tracking process to judge the safety of the home, the capability of the parent in order to provide the child with that bonding experience that's so important?

Mrs. Fritz: I think what's working really well – and this has been evolving over the last 24 months – is what we've talked about before for outcome-based cases. What's working well is an agency working with the worker, the child and family services authorities worker. The agency and the front-line worker for the CFSA now go together to the home. If they go to the home that you described and they have a young infant and the mother for whatever reason is going to be separated from that infant for a period of time, they work together to ensure that the infant visits with the mother and that bonding continues to occur. You know, I've heard of cases that you're describing as well. But they work together in order to do that. The real issue is to create permanency and to have that child back with the mother, the father, the family as quickly as possible with the right supports and resources in place so that they can keep them safe. That creates stability within the family.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. One of the holdups is the psychological assessment. In your opinion – and I know it's a bit of a wish list question – within the system, within Children and Youth Services, or through the contracting out of the psych assessments do you believe we have sufficient individuals conducting those assessments so they can be done early on, with a potential reunification if the assessment and other observational tools – the quality of the home, et cetera – turn out to be acceptable? I'm concerned. For example, with learning disabilities in the school system we have very few psychologists. Are you of the opinion that we're getting close to the right ratio of psychologists to families in terms of reunification?

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security has asked the minister if he could also supplement the previous answer.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. Yes.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I think I should point out in the interest of the integrity of the child welfare system in this province and the police and court system – the member in his previous question alleged an incident that he's aware of in which a breastfeeding mother of a two-month-old child was put in remand because of nonpayment of LRT tickets. I think the member should probably table some evidence of that in order that the minister or the Solicitor General can react to that. I wouldn't for a second want to leave Albertans with the impression that that was possible.

Mr. Chase: I'll be glad to supply that information to both ministries. The problem is that it did occur. As I say, I'll have to give you the details in private. I'm not making allegations; this is the reality of the case.

Mr. Oberle: Well, you made the allegation in the House; you should table the information in the House.

Mr. Chase: I'll be glad to do that. Thank you.

Back to the minister on the question with regard to psych assessments and the number of people performing them. Are we getting close to what you think is a manageable amount so that cases aren't delayed based on waiting for a psych assessment?

Mrs. Fritz: I'm just going to ask that you elaborate just a bit more on that, if you're talking about children with mental health needs or if you're talking about psych assessments. You'd like that for every child in care? If you could just elaborate.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm sorry if I wasn't clear. At some point in the process of returning a child to their parent, the parent is going to undergo, at least the parents that I've dealt with, some kind of a psychological assessment as to their fitness as a parent or their potential for developing the skills necessary to provide for the needs of the child. As I mentioned, in education the number of psychologists is very limited. Therefore, for the kids who have learning disabilities the old-fashioned coding takes forever. It can take, you know, a year or longer.

Within Children and Youth Services do we have a greater number of available psychologists to do the assessments, which will then in turn provide a base of possibility for returning a child if the assessment of the parent is found to be acceptable?

8:20

Mrs. Fritz: I can say that I've not found that there's been any barrier in any way to assessments based on a lack of qualified professional psychologists.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions for the Minister of Children and Youth Services? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: I have one, Mr. Chairman. I was looking at the budget estimates for the year 2010-11, and certainly my question would be reflected in those budget estimates. This ministry cut nearly \$27 million from child intervention within the original budget. Now it needs an increase of \$40 million just to make it through to the end of the year. May I ask in regard to the case files what basis was made at this time last year to remove the \$27 million from that budget, that is obviously now needed and more?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you. As I indicated, the \$27 million has been replaced through this \$40 million, so that's, you know, back into the base. Also, the \$13 million is into the base for a total of \$40 million. That's due to an increase in caseload and an increase in volume and the great success that we're having for increased permanency for children. In child intervention what we work toward is creating permanent homes for children through adoption, through close, close kinship care. That's what this funding is being utilized for. The cases really are a lot more complex as well.

The Deputy Chair: Any further questions?

Culture and Community Spirit

The Deputy Chair: Any questions? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for allowing me this opportunity to ask a question in supplementary supply here. Just to give the minister a little bit of background, I'm going to ask a question on the grants process going to the Art Gallery of Alberta. I think in this budget you're requesting some 2 and a half plus million dollars for a capital grant to the Art Gallery of Alberta, which we understand to be a major item of capital expenditure presumably related to the new gallery.

This gallery opened in early 2010. According to the gallery's 2009 report the province contributed \$15 million from the lottery fund and another \$12 million from the major community facilities program prior to 2009, and the federal government contributed another \$10 million from its building Canada fund in 2009. So we're wondering what this capital is for. Why was this expense not anticipated in the budget for the current fiscal year?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Blackett: Well, thank you. It's a very good question. The reason is that upon completion of the project the Art Gallery of Alberta realized that they had cost overruns in the amount of \$3 million. The government of Alberta had put in \$27 million. We didn't want to see them have to eat into their operating revenue to be able to pay off that deficit, so we asked for an increase of \$2.6 million to offset that cost so that they will be able to move on and start on a solid financial footing.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I was very pleased, as obviously was the Member for Edmonton-Centre, about the success of your trip down to Hollywood and some of the potential shoots. Good news. Then the bad news. It seems that the film studios, if I heard correctly, at Olympic Park are being at least temporarily put on hold. Am I wrong in that, or are the film studios going ahead?

Then maybe I can just ask about the completion date or the hoped-for completion date: all well?

Mr. Blackett: The film studio and the Alberta creative hub we have all intentions of trying to move forward. We haven't allocated money in the budget for it yet, but where we are in the process: we're looking at a facility at Canada Olympic Park, and it's going to be three levels of government plus a contribution from the private sector.

We advanced \$1.2 million to Calgary Economic Development to finish their business case and hire a consortium called Lawson Projects, a combination of architects, engineering firm, and real estate expertise, to look at the feasibility of that site to make sure that the way we operate it is going to be the best possible way. We have the management team in place. Before we go and put money towards it, we want to make sure that we have everything in place and that we have indeed chosen the best site. We're at that point now where we're trying to get to the financial negotiations on the land, come up with a price that WinSport Canada has given to us that we can accept. We're in the process of negotiating it as we speak.

Mr. Chase: I guess it's asking you to do a crystal ball here. You've got a very good relationship with WinSport. We saw the three arenas coming up very quickly. A very successful project.

I'm guessing that with that established relationship it's potentially a done deal, especially if the feds come in and support your provincial efforts. Getting to the bid process, can you guess as to whether we're a year out or less in terms of knowing what cooperative circumstance you're facing?

Mr. Blackett: Well, that will be determined by Treasury Board when I go to them and apply for the monies for the provincial portion. I'm hoping to do that sooner rather than later. Once we get that confirmation, then we'll be able to tell you in a much more orderly fashion what the timeline will be. Construction of the sound stages, for instance, shouldn't take more than six months.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions for the minister? Okay.

Employment and Immigration

Mr. Chase: One of the overall concerns I have, Mr. Minister, is with immigrants and support for immigrants, particularly the children of immigrants. I know it doesn't come up when we're dealing with temporary foreign workers. Immigrant children and immigrant workers took a double hit. Their children took a hit in Education with cutbacks to English as a second language programming. Then within the Ministry of Employment and Immigration there was a hit to language and ESL programming. Are you not concerned, with the provincial nominee program and the successes that we've had there, that if you cut funding for language programming, that's going to put unnecessary barriers in the way of full employment for immigrants in Alberta?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Chairman, I would love to answer that question, but I would first have to ask this hon. member to elaborate further on whether he's talking about the budget for this year for this ministry, that's tabled and hasn't yet been debated, or talking about the supplementary estimates that we are discussing today? I have a distinct feeling that he's trying to get me into a debate on this year's budget, and I'm not prepared to do that with him.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To the contrary. We'll have that discussion in the 30 minutes provided to me during the budget.

Where I'm coming from, Mr. Minister, is that within the supplementary supply budget – \$18,009,000 – I don't see anything directed towards retraining, language programs, literacy, toss in Alberta Works if you want to extend it beyond strictly the immigrant circumstance, and also the idea of upgrading. You know the joke about if you're going to get sick, the best place to be sick is in a cab. I'm concerned that language, upgrading, and retraining aspects are missing in the sup supply. Possibly you can direct me to where they are, but I don't see them.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the last round of budgeting last year this ministry and this department did some very careful and responsible estimating on what will be required to provide Albertans with the services and programs that they require. We have done so in those particular categories. That's why we have not needed any supplemental funding to operate and provide the services during the fiscal year up until the budget of this year.

8:30

Supplemental estimates are only for areas where additional expenses have been incurred that were not foreseeable and could not have been predicted by this department in any way possible. So, no, we are not asking right now for additional funding for provision of integration services, English as an additional language services, because all of those programs have been adequately estimated in the initial budget and have been and will continue to be delivered.

Mr. Chairman, where this ministry is asking for additional funding is in the areas that no one, frankly, could have predicted. All of the asks that you see before you today are a result of unanticipated caseload growth, mostly in areas of low-income assistance for our clients.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm very sincere in asking these questions. I realize that budgets aren't prepared overnight. Obviously, there was a fair amount of discussion, I think, as you've mentioned and other members have mentioned, about the preparation of the budget in general. But then three days later – and I can't imagine that the supplementary budget occurred just in a three-day process. Obviously, you mentioned caseloads have increased. Is there not a little bit of a disconnect between having had a budget just brought down and then a very short time later realizing a series of deficiencies that need increased funding in the form of a supplementary budget? I understand, for example, come the fall, you know, changes in oil prices and so on, changes in employment trends and needs, where you'd ask for a change in your supplementary budget. It's the close proximity of the two processes that I would appreciate the explanation for.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Chairman, not for a moment do I doubt this member's sincerity. I'm sure he cares about the programs we deliver and that he understands the amount of work that goes into putting a budget together. But with all due respect, what I am doubting is the member's understanding of what it is that we are actually doing today.

Mr. Chairman, the estimates, the additional funding that I'm asking this House to provide this ministry with, is in addition to last year's budget. We have reached the third quarter of last year's budget, and we had unforeseen growth in caseloads, especially in income supports caseloads, which then translates also to medical services benefit cards and provision of additional services, which basically means that this ministry has run out of money in last year's budget. In order to fulfil our obligation to our clients and provide them with benefits up until the end of this budget year, we require these additional funds to be able to do so.

The budget that our minister of finance and President of the Treasury Board just tabled three or four days ago is for next year, and we're not asking for any additional money to next year's budget. If we ever will, that will be probably around the third quarter of that budget, which is exactly a year from now. So I hope we have a clear understanding that the additional funding I'm asking for is for last year's budget, not this year's budget.

That now confirms that my initial supposition was correct, that this member is talking totally about the wrong budget. So put away your 2010-11 budget book, pull out your 2011-12, and then we can talk apples and apples.

Mr. Chase: I appreciate that explanation. You are right; I was confused about the catch-up nature of the budget. I don't know whether it's possible, however, when you're preparing a budget, to look back over the year and the needs and have a look at popu-

lation, take a look at inflation, and potentially come closer in the preparation of budgets so that the requirement – I realize that \$18 million is not a significant amount of sort of carry-over.

Also, a question I would ask with regard to specifically the caseloads. I asked the question of the Minister of Children and Youth Services. With workers' compensation there are going to be individuals with more difficult cases, more difficult interpretations as to their right to receive compensation, but will the supplemental budget increase that you've provided to get us through the 2010-2011 year provide for workers' needs in terms of managing the caseloads? The reason I ask this, hon. minister, is that we've seen circumstances where individuals are bonused for reducing caseloads but not always and not obviously recognizing the needs of the injured worker. So the question: is it sufficient? Is the caseload reasonable?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Chairman, this member is putting me in a very difficult position because I'm trying to be as kind and respectful as I possibly can be, but he's making it very difficult because of his questions. He might as well be asking me about the Edmonton Oilers and the trades that they did last year because his questions are as relevant to what we're doing today as the recent trades between the Oilers and whoever else they traded with.

The Workers' Compensation Board, Mr. Chairman, is not in last year's budget, it is not in this year's budget, and it will not be in next year's budget. Workers' Compensation Board is a self-financed insurance system paid for by the employers of this province. They assess premiums against employers based on their expenditures and projected risk. Taxpayers are not involved in the system at all. It doesn't come before this House. It is not the purview of our accounting.

When I'm talking, hon. member, about caseloads, I'm actually talking about caseloads that have to do with our budget that we are reviewing, last year's budget. Maybe I'll put it in a colloquial term. It's a term we don't use anymore, but maybe it'll help him to understand. Welfare is what we're talking about, where it is virtually impossible to very accurately predict what the caseload will be because under current legislation – and so it should be – any person who presents himself or herself in our office in need and who meets our eligibility criteria is entitled to receive some form of financial assistance. Because of the fact that we were still on the tail end of a recession, our caseload continued to grow. It plateaued probably about six months ago and now finally started to decrease. That is why additional funding was required to provide these families, needy families, with much-needed social assistance. That also translates, then, to a medical services card and dental work and whatever it is that they happen to be entitled to. So this is what we're talking about.

Let me get this straight, Mr. Chairman, for the benefit, perhaps, of that member. We are discussing last year's budget following the third quarter, not this year's budget, and we're discussing matters only contained in last year's budget and not anything outside of that that is not the purview of this House.

Mr. Chase: And I appreciate that. Basically, I agree with you that Alberta Works is a form of welfare. It helps individuals to retrain. It provides them with subsidies for living. It provides them with not a wage, necessarily, that they can operate on, but it does provide help. Now, my understanding – and I know you'll correct me if I'm wrong – is that the money for Alberta Works has basically either been frozen or levelled off, and I don't see it helping people out in the tail part of the last quarter that you're referencing. Are you concerned going forward or just getting through our last quarter that there is going to be sufficient funding in Alberta Works to

keep people retrained, living in an affordable accommodation? Help me here if you can, please.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Chairman, that's a tall order, but I'll do my best. Again, when a minister approaches this House in the third quarter asking for additional supplemental funding for the ministry for the last quarter, it is not to say that all of a sudden in the last quarter with some additional money there will be some catch-up work done. This ministry's and this government's obligation to Albertans in need is ongoing and consistent based on eligibility criteria.

At the beginning of every budget that the minister tables for the next budgetary year based on best available information, we estimate what our caseload will be, how many thousands of Albertans will be relying on various forms of social assistance. We then quantify that into dollars, and with that number we go to the Treasury Board, and we ask them to put that number into next year's budget.

8:40

Now, if next year we find out that, for example, fewer Albertans decided to turn up in our offices and ask for additional dollars, if there are surplus dollars, they go back to the Treasury. If the opposite takes place, as happened last year – additional individuals continued to show up – we run into a third quarter basically running our account dry. So we show up today before this House, and we ask for additional dollars to basically allow us to provide ongoing, steady services to Albertans who happen to be on our caseload right now. Then as of March 31 the new budget will kick in, and we'll carry on providing the very same services.

So there is no up and down in the provision of services. There is no influx of services, because we just have received additional dollars. The eligibility is basically the same. We just need to extend the dollars to be able to cover the last three months of the year to get us to the new budget, which then will provide us with ongoing funding.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm aware that the computer program caused a large glitch in terms of getting the money to the people that needed it. I'm not talking about that part of it.

What I did ask – and possibly you didn't hear my question – was that we saw a growing trend in the fall of people needing to access Alberta Works funding. In the budget declaration there was a rather rosy picture of 40,000 new jobs for Albertans, which would suggest that people were finding work and weren't necessarily going back to school for retraining. Is this why only \$18 million was asked for, because the projections that your department is making along with the Treasury suggest we're going to be out of this recession faster than we were looking at? I mean, how much is based on the reality of the increased fall caseload continuing on into the spring as opposed to everybody is going to find work faster rather than later?

Mr. Lukaszuk: I think I already answered this question. Mr. Chairman, I have to remind this member that today is February 28. The new budget kicks in April 1. This ministry has not stopped providing services because we ran into our third quarter and there was no more money, nor will this ministry start providing more lucrative services to anyone if and when this committee approves supplemental funding.

Mr. Chairman, there is a very consistent set of eligibility criteria for any and all Albertans that come to our office. If they meet that criteria, they receive the benefits irrespective of what the situation

is. When there are more Albertans qualifying for benefits, that puts the minister at the end of third quarter in a position to come and ask for additional dollars so that all of those benefits are funded. You will not find any difference in provision of services. As a matter of fact, you know, there is only one month left. How and why would anybody anticipate that the levels of programs would suddenly change?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have one question for the hon. minister. I'm looking at the \$53 million request for income supports due to higher caseloads in the 2010-11 budget estimates. I see where the amount that we were to budget for people on income supports, people expected to work or working, was reduced from \$254 million forecast for 2009-10 down to \$230 million. Now the minister is before the House tonight looking for that money to be put back into the budget, essentially. You're looking for – I've just got to find it here – yes, \$30.2 million. The reference, element 2.5.2.

That indicates to me that that original budget, the cut in that budget, was inaccurate and inappropriate. I would ask the minister to explain the rationale for why this budget was initially reduced from \$254 million to \$230 million, and now, of course, we're essentially asking for that amount of money back. How was that decision made?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, the decision was made in a very predictable way. The member was a part of that decision-making process because last year this minister appeared before the estimates committee and I walked the opposition and all members interested in attending that committee line by line on how it is that we built last year's budget. The fact of the matter, Mr. Chairman, is that the economic recovery was somewhat delayed relative to our expectation. Our caseload did not plateau and start decreasing on our Alberta Works files as we anticipated it would but actually grew further into the year and now just started to drop. That is the change in the numbers.

The fact of the matter is that we utilize the best information available in setting our budget. We look at economic conditions, we look at employment conditions, we predict how many individuals will be requiring our assistance, and we put the best available number forward. It is natural that there would be a variance because the economy and the rate of recovery for our economy was not very predictable. However, we are living up to our obligation to Albertans, and we will continue to provide them with adequate services.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to the same minister.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I've been following with some interest the debate that has been going on here tonight. I heard some of the explanation given by the hon. minister that work does not stop in his ministry on February 28, when he comes into this thing. If people are in need, they receive services from his department, and they receive no greater service after this date than they did before and the like. If that's his explanation, why budget for your department? Why not just say that anyone who comes in for need – if that truly is what you say happens, why even budget for it? If people have a need for it – you know, are you just saying that's how you guys did it? Is this sup supply exercise merely an exercise in futility, or do your budgets mean something there? If we're out of money, we're going to be out of money.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Chairman, that is an unusual position to take from the opposite side. Number one, obviously every ministry has to budget an estimate of what their expenditures will be so that our minister of finance can do his work for the government of Alberta. But this member right now is suggesting to me that as of the third quarter, when this ministry ran out of money, we should have put up closed signs in all of our welfare offices, as you wish to call them, and said: please don't bother showing up in our office for the next three months; there will be no cheques or services issued.

That is not the position of this government, Mr. Chairman. We have a fiduciary duty to those who are in need, and we are committed to assisting them in any way possible on their road to recovery to full independence and self-sufficiency. So I certainly hope that this member is being sarcastic and he's not asking this ministry to basically withhold provision of any and all social services to Albertans for the last three months of this quarter.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity to the same minister.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I realize this isn't 2 in the morning, but I'd like to see greater respect. The hon. minister in his previous life was a teacher, and I can't imagine that he spoke to his students in the same offhand, all-knowing attitude. I would appreciate respect being shown. Respect has to be earned. I understand that. But when we ask a question, even if you don't consider it to be important, I would appreciate that you do your best to answer that question.

8:50

When I asked about caseloads, I was in fact talking about two separate items. I was talking about the Alberta Works caseload, which you rightly refer to as a type of welfare program, which it is. I have no problem with that. But you also indicated that you saw a growing trend in the fall with increased caseloads, and therefore there is a requirement to get an increase in funding to see us through, even if it's the next month. I'm aware that on April 1 we have a new budget, which will hopefully be satisfactory until more is required in the fall, as you explained.

In terms of asking for this increased \$18 million, is the \$18 million just to get us through the month of March, and that's why you're not concerned about the growing cases from the fall increasing even further in the spring? If you could possibly answer that specific question, I would understand better what you're trying to point out to us.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Chairman, I think I have tried to answer these questions the best that I can. This member initially stood up and was asking me questions about the wrong budget. Then he stood up and was asking me questions about WCB. To extend that to an analogy of a teacher, you know, it's very analogous to him showing up in a physics class and handing in his essay on Shakespeare, because that's exactly, really, what happened.

The fact is, Mr. Chairman, that we are asking for a supplemental amount of \$65,244,000 together with \$31,794,000, made available from lower than budgeted spending in other programs. That is the whole amount. Yes, it is to carry us over from today until the new budget kicks in on April 1. Those are the dollars required to carry on with programs based on the very same amount of service and eligibility criteria. That's what it's really all about. It's a process that this member has been involved in for a number of years already. There is nothing new about it, and the line of questioning is really quite surprising.

Mr. Chase: Well, if nothing else, I provide surprises.

My next question has to do with the relationship of the Workers' Compensation Board to Employment and Immigration. In Public Accounts when we called for Employment and Immigration, there was no representative from the Workers' Compensation Board that showed, although my understanding is that it comes under the governance of Employment and Immigration. You mentioned that it's strictly a taxable program. It's based on employers covering injuries and individuals putting away funds and so on. My concern is how you can just simply absent yourself from the governance of workers' compensation. Specifically to workers' compensation, are you saying that as the Minister of Employment and Immigration you have nothing to do with the conduct, the governance of caseloads and support for injured workers in workers' compensation? Are they completely independent? You have no governance nor a fiduciary or administrative role in workers' compensation?

Mr. Lukaszuk: I am not saying anything about workers' compensation, Mr. Chairman, nor will I be saying anything about workers' compensation because this discussion is not about workers' compensation.

Mr. Chairman, with the indulgence of this House, let me tell you what it is that I'm asking for. I'm asking for supplemental estimates for program planning and delivery, \$8,423,000; career development services, \$11,190,000; basic skills and academic upgrading, \$487,000. Under health benefits for the Alberta adult health benefit, \$7,006,000; people expected to work or working receiving assistance, \$4,706,000; people not expected to work, \$7,675,000. Under income supports I'm asking for supplemental dollars for people expected to work or working receiving additional top-up benefits of \$30,261,000; people not expected to work, \$22,967,000; labour relations policy and legislation development, \$127,000; employment standards, enforcement and regional services, \$553,000; foreign qualification recognition to build our labour force, \$1,253,000; and for a federal community development trust an additional \$2,040,000.

All together on a balance sheet, Mr. Chairman, it adds up to \$65,244,000. That is what I'm asking for, and that is what will be voted on at the end of this particular session.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Coming at it from a different angle, if I heard your amount correctly, you're saying that it's going to take \$65 million to get us through this next month in terms of the requirements for the various programs. Twice you mentioned in your categories millions of dollars for people not expected to return to work, if I heard you correctly. Can you give me a sense of what individuals would fall into that category of not expected to return to work and if there isn't a relationship between workers' compensation and the not expected to return to work individuals that you're talking about?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Chairman, there is no relationship between workers' compensation and those not expected to work. Those are individuals who, unfortunately, have multiple barriers to employment. There could be illness. There could be unforeseeable life circumstances that happen to people from time to time. It could be lifestyle choices. It could be addictions. There could be a number of reasons why an individual at a given period of time, upon an assessment, is not expected to work right now but will be provided assistance, counselling, whatever is required, and one day will be expected to return to work.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Thank you for that explanation. It's the one day they will be expected to return to work. My experience is that benefits get cut off as a way of forcing a person back to work potentially before they're ready to assume those responsibilities. How do you, within the program you just described, determine a person's ability to return to work and make sure that all the medical assessments, whether it's psychological or physical, have been thoroughly examined so that we're not putting that person or the workers around that person into a dangerous situation? If they're no longer capable of returning to work, how do we determine that date of readiness?

Mr. Lukaszuk: Mr. Chairman, it's a complex decision. It varies from person to person as circumstances are as individual as we are. The fact is that our offices, our labour market information centres – there are 59 of them throughout the province – meet with these clients frequently and provide them with support services. Some require forms of counselling. Some require some vocational retraining. Some may require simply building up their capacity to work; their lifestyle needs to turn around. We have a variety of programs provided either directly or indirectly through not-for-profit agencies and others. At the end of the day every single Albertan is encouraged to work to the maximum of their capacity.

Some individuals, unfortunately, may not be fully independent of some form of assistance for a long period of time or ever, but services are extended to them to the best of our ability until we find that they are able to earn a living for themselves. We have also restructured our benefits, where a person can actually receive our benefits but supplement them with income because that allows them a possibility of entering the workforce and, hopefully, one day becoming independent of social assistance.

The focus of the entire program is return to work. Any and all effort is exerted to assist that person to get back to or enter for a first time the world of employment.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Hopefully, this falls within the purview because you were talking about those who can't return to work. To what extent have you cross-ministerial discussions or connections with, for example, a person being tracked to AISH where it's determined that due to injury or due to mental capacity or some circumstance they can no longer work? I also understand the difference between long-term disability that we as teachers were able to access and workers' compensation. If you could talk about your cross-ministry initiatives and if that's reflected in the budget.

9:00

Mr. Lukaszuk: Well, Mr. Chairman, I clearly just listed what is included, and I did not mention AISH, so it wasn't. There is an ongoing relationship between this department and that of seniors and community development. If we have clients in the not-expected-to-work category and we find that their barriers are so complex and they're medical or involve mental health illness, those clients are assisted, actually, in filling out AISH applications. If the medical community supports the client, the client often will be transferred seamlessly from the benefits under this department to that of AISH.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions?

Environment

The Deputy Chair: Any questions to the Minister of Environment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much. Now, as I understand it, the supplementary amount of \$1.6 million is requested under expense and equipment/inventory purchases together with \$7.8 million made available from lower than budget spending in other programs, and this is to provide 9 and a half million dollars as part of the Bassano dam settlement with the Siksika First Nation. This amount represents \$8.4 million in discontinuances and releases and a 2010-11 access payment of \$1 million, and there are nonbudgetary disbursements for \$12.8 million also requested for the Bassano dam settlement agreement with the Siksika First Nation.

What specific programs provided the \$7.8 million from lower than budgeted spending? That would be my first question, Mr. Chairman, to the hon. minister.

My second one – I may as well get them on the record – is: why is the ministry requesting the supplementary amount of \$12.8 million for prepayments of future year expenses? Or do I have that wrong? Why not budget for that in the necessary year?

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The member is absolutely correct. The entire request that we have before the House this evening is to deal with the settlement with the Siksika Nation with respect to the Bassano dam. That settlement was, in fact, \$22.32 million. It consists of \$9.54 million for discontinuance of all litigation and release of the claims on the first annual access payment that the member actually referred to, plus \$12.78 million to prepay annual access payments for the next 14 years.

Mr. Chairman, the reason that the \$12.78 million is a nonbudgetary disbursement is because it will have to be incorporated into our budget over the next 12 years. If the member would look ahead, he'll see that we have actually budgeted \$1.088 million next year to cover the payments for next year, and that same allocation will be in the subsequent years. That was part of the negotiated settlement that was arrived at. It was a settlement for a long-standing dispute over land and access to the Bassano dam on Siksika First Nation land, and that was the settlement that was agreed to.

As for the offsetting amount of \$7.869 million, this is deferred funding of Ecotrust funds. In 2009 we entered into a number of clean energy partnerships aimed at improving a number of initiatives. Each of those initiatives had various milestones that had to be achieved before payments would accrue, and in some cases some of those projects, for various reasons, have not met those milestones, so the dollars that would be allocated to them will float through to them in future years. That's the reason for the deferral. In addition, three projects approved in 2010 have now been cancelled, so those funds will be then reallocated and made available in future years as well.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I realize that the money, almost \$13 million, is very specific to the Bassano dam project. I thoroughly understand that. I'm just wondering, in your supplementary budgets and as an indicator of where we're potentially headed in terms

of funding priorities, if there was any consideration of increasing either air or water monitoring, particularly in the oil sands area. This doesn't appear to be, at least from a supplementary point of view, a priority. Am I wrong? Can you give me hope that within your regular budget that funding is there, and we're not being reliant on industry to provide us with gradations of pollution?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Chairman, we're getting into a line of questioning very similar to the line of questioning that we had with the previous ministry. This is dealing with supplementary requisition for the past fiscal year. The member is asking questions that relate to my budget in the next fiscal year, and I look forward to having a deep and intense discussion at that time, but this is not the appropriate time to enter into that discussion.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, and I'll try to possibly phrase the question differently. The only environmental concern that is necessary to be dealt with for this next month, the month of March, is the paying off, basically, of a treaty or a land claims agreement. There aren't any other environmental concerns that require tide-over funding for this next month. Is that correct?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Chair, I'm very proud to say that the administration in my department has worked very diligently to ensure that we live within the allocated budget that was approved by this Assembly last year, and the current programs that we have in place will be adequately funded through until the end of March of this fiscal year, and then we will begin to use the allocation that, hopefully, this Legislature will see fit to approve for next year. So no further requests are asked for, and I'm proud to say no further requests are required at this time.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions?

Infrastructure

The Deputy Chair: Any questions for the Minister of Infrastructure?

Mr. Chase: A common approach for both the Liberals and the Wildrose, although we seem to be at ideological odds, is the spreading out of the infrastructure dollars over, say, a three- to five-year period. I don't see any recognition. I know we're now only talking about the month of March, but does the Ministry of Infrastructure believe that it's prudent to push through at our expense the buildings as represented by this sup supply? I realize we're just talking about the last month, but I'm trying to look at it as a harbinger of either greater or lesser things to come.

9:10

Mr. Danyluk: Well, I'm not exactly sure where you were going with that, right? But let me just say that this is probably one of the most unusual circumstances for supplementary supply, and that is because the funding for capital for infrastructure was in Alberta Health Services, okay? Infrastructure this past year has taken it over, so all I'm asking for is the \$57.6 million that was there to come back into infrastructure so that I can continue to fund the same projects that Alberta Health Services was going to fund anyway. So it's not really asking for any additional funds but is what I would consider bookkeeping. Thank you.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. So we could look at it, basically, as a transfer of funds because of a transfer of authority?

Mr. Danyluk: Yes, very much so.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions?

Justice

The Deputy Chair: The hon. President of the Treasury Board and Finance and Enterprise minister.

Mr. Snelgrove: As you know, providing safe and secure communities is a priority of this government, and the safe communities initiative certainly does that. In the fall of 2010 Health and Wellness informed the Treasury Board that it would lapse \$12.7 million in its 2010-11 safe communities initiative budget. At the same time Treasury Board agreed to reallocate the funds to the safe communities budget in Justice to fully utilize the \$148.5 million allocated across all ministries to support safe communities. At the request of the former Minister of Justice SafeCom in conjunction with partnering ministries identified priority projects important to supporting safe communities at work. A wide range of projects totalling \$12.7 million were identified, including projects that support gang awareness, family violence, parenting, specialized courts, mentoring, research, and knowledge transfer.

Specific projects will be announced in the near future once the grant agreements with applicants have been finalized. The supplementary supply estimates for Justice in the amount of \$9.5 million will allow these priority projects to proceed. The \$9.5 million is comprised of the \$12.7 million of one-time additional funding for safe communities, partially offset by the \$3.2 million in surplus funds declared by the ministry in the third-quarter fiscal updates.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hehr: So, again, this is just simply a transfer of funds within the ministry that were devoted to the safe communities initiative. I think that's what the hon. member said. I'm just wondering: will all these plans be used up? Will these programs be announced in this budgetary year within the next, say, month, before April 1?

Mr. Snelgrove: As soon as we're able to have contracts in place with the different providers that we're doing it with, then they will be announced. I could give you some examples without giving you the detailed names, but in all fairness they're in the middle of negotiating with the different providers.

Mr. Hehr: Fair enough. Those projects have been selected?

Mr. Snelgrove: Yes.

Mr. Hehr: Fair enough.

Mr. Chase: Again I'm trying to limit my question to the month of March, which, basically, is what we're talking about. I do not see – possibly you can tell me if specific funding is being directed towards legal aid. To me one of the ways of establishing a safe community is making sure that people are adequately represented when they find themselves before a judge or jury circumstance. Is any of that approximately 9 and a half million dollars directed towards legal aid?

Mr. Snelgrove: Hon. member, no, it is not.

The Deputy Chair: Any further questions?

Municipal Affairs

The Deputy Chair: This takes us to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The request is for a supplementary estimate of nearly \$191 million for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. The majority of this request is for the 10 disaster recovery and municipal wildfire assistance programs that were established in the 2010-11 fiscal year. This money is to help Albertans recover from the devastating effects of unpredictable weather conditions and wildfires. In total, we implemented one municipal wildfire assistance program and nine disaster recovery programs. The remaining amount of the supplementary estimate I'm requesting is for costs associated with the municipal government board that are recovered from municipalities. As well, we were able to identify a million dollars in savings, which is being used to offset this supplementary estimate request. This request will help my ministry continue to ensure Albertans can build on the strength of their individual communities.

Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I realize disasters aren't predictable and that, basically, you're trying to provide insurance after a fashion and assurance to the individuals who have been affected. Will the amount that has been requested in supplemental supply to see the 2010-11 year to its conclusion see the people, for example, in Irvine, many of whom are living in trailers or with relatives – will that see sufficient seed money for them to do the reconstruction that's necessary? Part of the problem has been that it's been a separate agency that's been determining it and then passing along the information to the ministry as opposed to the ministry dealing directly with it. It appears like it's a significant amount of money, but will it put people back in their homes and give them some comfort with the winter basically half over?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The dollars that were approved should be sufficient to be able to cover the costs that are remaining for the southern Alberta disaster recovery program. There was \$200 million that was approved under that particular program. Subsequently, that's been readjusted to about \$160 million. The intent of the program is to bring people back to a situation that is as close as possible to where they were before the disaster struck.

What we're finding is that disasters can occur very, very rapidly, Mr. Chairman, but the recovery can take a long time. I want to indicate that even though we're using a private group to assess that, there are some strong advantages to implementing the program and to managing the program. There are some strong advantages for us to go that way rather than having staff full-time, always under our payroll, to be able to deal with it. They've got a contractual obligation with us to meet certain standards. Our role is to ensure that the group providing that particular service is meeting those standards, meeting the guidelines, and meeting the timeframes that are identified by contract.

The dollars have so far covered the majority of the individuals within the individual homeowners. Those are the priorities that we had given. The second set were to the aboriginal communities and those that experienced some damages there, then to our farm communities. The third was to our small businesses that got affected and, finally, to the municipalities that incurred some losses. So a very extensive program, probably one of the largest disaster

programs that we've had in the province of Alberta; thereby, the need for the great amount of dollars that we have requested.

Mr. Chase: Does this significant sum of money include any form of arbitration in the sense that a person goes through a contracted agency and is not satisfied that their claim has been sufficiently recognized? Does that allow for any type of arbitration or supports for resolving the discrepancy between what a person believes they're owed and what the private contracted agency is giving them?

9:20

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Chairman, that's an excellent question. There's no doubt that what individuals feel they're owed and what the program criteria sets out sometimes differ. We find that this particular program is meant to cover those parts that insurance will not cover and areas where insurance is not readily available or not, you know, financially available to particular individuals. It will not cover issues such as an individual having cancelled his insurance policy or renegeing or not renewing his insurance policy. So there might still be voids.

The program allows for a review every time there's new information that comes to us. There's no doubt that there are a number of individuals where we've had a look at their individual files a number of times as more information comes to light, as they find out about more damages that were unseen before or undetermined. As they find those, they can always come back to us for a review. The process of review goes through the agency initially, and then it goes through our ministry, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency staff, and then, finally, if there are still some concerns or issues, they come to my particular desk for review as well. Because of the initial comments from that particular program we did make some changes to the program criteria to make sure that more people are qualified and that they qualify for more funding.

Having said that, we've dealt with about 98 per cent of the applications, and the majority of the applicants are quite satisfied. We still have a few percentages out there with some very tough files and some files that are quite complicated.

Mr. Hehr: Just regarding the \$400,000 being requested for costs related to the new compensation assessment review boards, what are these costs that they would be incurring?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, those are costs that are incurred by the board for hearing appeals on assessments, and they can either hear residential assessment appeals or industrial, commercial types of appeals. With the changes that we've done within the boards themselves, the mandate was that the added costs were there.

Now, I need to reemphasize – and I think it's identified there – that those costs are passed back to municipalities, so it comes through our budget. It's an extra cost, but those are charged back to the individual municipalities involved.

Mr. Hehr: The compensation assessment review boards. Maybe you could help me with what, in fact, they're reviewing, just from that simple viewpoint.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The reviews are on the actual assessments for tax purposes. So a municipality will assess a particular property at a particular level, and then if there's an appeal and they can't resolve some of the decisions at the local municipal level, it goes to a further step, and that's this step.

Mr. Hehr: So the city and the taxpayer, whoever uses the service or whoever wins the case, will then pay for that hearing or service?

Mr. Goudreau: That's right. Those costs are charged back to the individual municipality that's dealing with that particular assessment.

Mr. Hehr: Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. If you could break that approximately \$200,000 ballpark into individual compensation, business compensation, and sort of public works, you know, replacing roads in municipalities that were heavy hit, kind of thing. Are you able to give that ballpark figure?

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I might remind the individual member that it is not \$200,000 but \$200 million that's involved.

Most of the claims are quite small in relation to the full program. We don't anticipate having to spend the full \$200 million. Initially we're probably averaging \$4,000 to \$5,000. I don't have those exact figures in front of me, but I could get them if you choose to have them. But typically they're smaller, and often it's to offset those extra costs that are incurred, that insurance companies will not cover.

Individual applicants are smaller. Those numbers climbed considerably, and we've had a number with small businesses and with the farming community as high as, say, \$300,000 per applicant. Then they jump quite dramatically when we deal with municipalities who've had to replace 15 or 20 bridges. The one in particular in Medicine Hat we advanced about \$17 million towards some of their anticipated costs. Those bills are still coming in and will take a number of months to finalize.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My last question has to do with: does any of this money account for sort of proactive flood – I mean, I guess you'd have fire suppression programs such as the selective logging. My concern is a little bit broader in the sense of allowing people to build on flood plains, for example, and then telling them that they are not insured, but the developer had been permitted to build on a flood plain. Is any of this money of sort of the educational or of the regulatory going forward to prevent disasters in the future?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Chairman, that's an excellent question. There has been a lot of work done in terms of mitigation towards future potential disasters. Our ministry through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency provides a lot of support in training and preparedness for disasters and trying to avoid or minimize disasters.

We're working with individual municipalities. I believe there are about 60 of them that are on river plains or areas where they're subject to periodic flooding. We're working with them in terms of trying to minimize damages and minimize the development along rivers and river valleys. Eventually municipalities are the ones that make those final land-use decisions, albeit we are trying to work with them to encourage development outside those particular areas.

We're also working with our federal government. For the members present here, once we reach a certain threshold, we qualify

for some assistance that comes from the federal government to offset some of these particular costs. Those are usually one, two, or three years after the fact. Part of the federal government's support to us is a percentage that's used in mitigation. Now, with what's been happening up till now, mitigation is usually allocated on a per individual basis, and it might include something that might say: "Your electrical box is in the basement and always gets damaged every time it floods. We'll help you move it to the main floor. We'll help you pay for some of those extra costs that are involved."

We're working along with our federal counterparts – and there are territorial and provincial ministers – to get the federal government to accept mitigation. As an off-the-wall example, maybe rather than building a little dike around everybody's house, we build a dike around the community rather than individually. We're trying to convince the federal government to pool mitigation dollars to be able to do a good project in the individual communities. We anticipate that decision to come down fairly soon here.

The Deputy Chair: Any further questions?

Seniors and Community Supports

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I just want to hammer home the notion that we believe that long-term care units are superior to assisted living in terms of providing the medical assistance necessary. However, how many units does the \$39 million increase to the affordable supportive living initiative provide for?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the member for his question, but long-term care spaces are not within my purview. Long-term care spaces are part of what Health and Wellness does. I do the designated assisted living.

The \$39 million was part of the ASLI grant program that came from the capital bonds. I was granted the \$50 million in my budget for ASLI, and then I had to grab the other \$39 million from the capital bonds account. That's why you see it here today. At this point in time it was part of the total. In the total I had 13 projects assigned. The total number of spaces: I'd have to check that and provide you with that information.

9:30

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The reason I ask is that, as the minister mentioned, the original budget was \$50 million, and this increase is a 78 per cent increase. What special circumstances transpired that required such a large immediate injection of funding? With that in mind as the backdrop, what communities are receiving more supportive living units . . . [interjection]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, you have the floor.

Mr. Chase: A 78 per cent increase. The question, then: what communities are the beneficiaries of more supportive living units because of this increase?

Mrs. Jablonski: If I could have the number for you, hon. member, the total number of units that the \$89 million is supporting is 912. The communities that are benefiting from the 912 spaces are Calgary, Didsbury, Edmonton, High River, Lacombe, Red Deer, Spruce Grove, Stettler, Westlock, and Grande Prairie.

Mr. Chase: Great. Thank you.

For the \$26 million increase to AISH, why is the cost of the health-related benefits increased by \$21 million from the budget? Then I'll give you the second part. For the difference, the \$5 million that is going towards financial benefits: is that simply from an increase in caseload or are recipients' benefits changing?

Mrs. Jablonski: The \$5 million that goes towards the income benefits is definitely caseload increases the we didn't project. They were higher this year than in the past. Probably the recession has a lot to do with that and the fact that there are fewer jobs. I would also say to you that the reason that there was such an increase in the health benefits is because of the pharmaceutical programs and the increased cost of the programs themselves. Benefits remain the same. The average amount of the medical benefit to an AISH client is about \$370 a month, but as the pharmaceuticals increase in price, the costs increase to us as well.

Mr. Hehr: Now, I guess, then, from your year budgeted number of how many people you thought were going to be on AISH, how many does this increase the total number of people on AISH in the province to at the end of the year?

Mrs. Jablonski: Right now the number of people that we have receiving AISH is 42,000. When I first became minister, I was saying 32,000, so you can see there is a significant increase in the number of people on AISH.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate that the costs of pharmaceuticals have gone up, and we've adjusted for that. That's a very merciful thing for us as a government to be doing. You've also indicated a significant increase in the number of AISH individuals. I realize that we're restricted by this being supplemental supply, but will that increase, at least on a temporary basis, tide us over for what seems to be a growing wave of individuals headed towards AISH requirements?

Mrs. Jablonski: The \$26 million that we've asked for in these supplemental estimates will be part of the base of the AISH budget going into the future.

The Deputy Chair: Any further questions for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports?

Service Alberta

The Deputy Chair: Any questions for the minister? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. There is a terrific amount of concern over security programs, and I know there are cross-ministry initiatives. For example, the housing minister is tracking individuals across the province requiring housing. We have the TALON project with the police. Then within your department in the 2009-10 annual report the minister announced that "a Chief Information Security Office was established to develop and implement a government-wide information security program." Now, in 2011, the ministry is asking for funds to create a corporate security office. Can the minister explain why she reported the establishment of the security office as accomplished in 2010 and is now asking for funds to create – is this the same office or added to that office, or is this a different office?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Happy to provide some clarity on this. The reason for the supplementary estimate is some of the things we've been working on with respect to the role of the chief information officer, which resides in Service Alberta, then working with the corporate security officer here and all the chief information officers across all the departments. That's one of the reasons why there was an increased ask for this. Also, again, working with the Auditor General and making sure we are enhancing the security of Albertans' information. That is certainly what we are doing with this supplementary ask.

The Deputy Chair: Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, do you wish to supplement that answer?

Mr. Denis: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to endeavour to correct the Member for Calgary-Varsity. He made some sort of assertion that my ministry was tracking everyone across this province. I just want to mention to this House through the chair that that is actually not the case. We do have an identification program that we work in conjunction with the hon. Minister of Service Alberta. This is pursuant to strict privacy guidelines. In fact, before we announced this program, we actually worked with the Privacy Commissioner, and we moved on . . . [interjection] Despite the chirping from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I will continue.

The identification program is just like a driver's licence or is simply an ID card that is used, and again very strict privacy concerns are respected. In fact, I just spoke with a gentleman from Portland, Oregon, this weekend who told me that, in fact, one of the biggest reasons that they've had a big success in reducing homeless numbers was because they had a similar identification program.

Plus, on this I just want to mention to this member that this identification program is on a voluntary basis. It's designed to help people get a leg up, start things like bank accounts. Twenty-three percent of homeless people actually work, so instead of going to a cheque cashing place, they can actually go and open up a bank account. These are things that any one of us takes for granted – identification, bank accounts, basic necessities – where we can help people get a leg up to becoming independent. It's not an issue about tracking people. In fact, we don't do that. There is no Big Brother here. It's about treating people as individuals and giving them some assistance where we can actually give them a leg up.

I can tell you that this identification program also shows that you do not necessarily need to spend a lot of money to make an impact in somebody's life. The costs are very minimal, and the benefits are very substantial.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Hopefully, the minister knows that I am not talking about or suggesting a Big Brother program. I've worked, and I've seen the minister and other members of this House. For example, the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill has participated in homeless outreach activities at which time identification cards were being processed. So I'm not worried about an invasion of privacy. I realize to help people you've got to have a sense of who it is you're helping. It's how that information is kept which is important to me.

Under technology services, including SuperNet, in the 2010-11 budget Service Alberta's budget was cut by 13 per cent, and its technology services budget was cut by 21 per cent. The department laid off over 400 employees. In November Deputy Minister Paul Pellis told the Public Accounts Committee: "We're providing at least an equivalent level of service at lower cost and with less

resources . . . achieving efficiencies and getting a more standardized delivery of our services across government." And again: "Service level expectations have been fully met" and "ministries . . . are receiving a very good level of service, and we're doing it at a lower cost."

It is forecast that Service Alberta will overspend its budget in technology services by more than 30 per cent this fiscal year, will overspend its budget for network services by 152 per cent. The deputy minister reports delivering efficiencies and costs savings. The minister is reporting that funds have been taken from other programs to pay for technology services and is also requesting additional funding to support what appears to be massive overspending.

9:40

Can the minister explain the inconsistencies of laying off 400 individuals, magically being able to have the same efficiencies, and now increased supplemental supply? It has this robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul as opposed to sustainable programming. I sit to be corrected.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to make it clear, the supplementary estimate has nothing to do with the 410 FTEs that were moved out last year. What has happened with the SuperNet final mile strategy and the whole technological world is that there's been a huge effort and a lot of work going on across departments, a lot of collaboration, a lot of good work working in that whole area.

With respect to some of the information and the foundational changes we've made across government, that is, indeed, where we've seen many savings, where government departments are looking at information, tracking it better, looking for duplication and standardization of services. That's absolutely critical. That relates, too, to the chief information officers in each of the departments, making sure that Albertans' information is tracked and kept secure. Finally, it's looking at how we monitor and how we track consumption. It's always the consumption of services that Albertans want, but it's also looking at the consumption of services across government departments, making sure that we are doing the right thing so we can serve Albertans better.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To a significant extent your ministry replaced what was previously known as restructuring and government efficiency. In other words, you've attempted to consolidate those services. You're indicating through both cross-ministerial initiatives and through the potential centralization of services and your ministry that this is the primary way of achieving the approved efficiencies. Did I paraphrase that correctly?

Mrs. Klimchuk: That's correct, but again just dealing with these supplementary estimates, just focusing on the foundational information technology, the SuperNet final mile strategy, and the Auditor General's recommendations, working with their good office and making sure the information that we have is secure. Lastly – you're right – it's the opportunity to partner with ministries to manage and monitor consumption of services.

This is what we needed for last year, but going forward for next year's budget, most certainly that will be part of the budget for next year.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We're trying to improve our information record keeping. In health, for example, we've got electronic records that can be read throughout the province to increase efficiency of health delivery. We have the program that we've questioned, the TALON. We have the tracking of individual needs, I'll call it, within the homeless program. Does your department have oversight of all the sort of security and information assembling, gathering, and delivering processes, or is it through cross-ministerial advice to these ministries that these various programs are being developed?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to your question FOIP and PIPA are mandated under Service Alberta. But it's important to note each department has its own FOIP officer that works with each minister in those areas. So the overarching support – I do not have anything to do with TALON, but I do have something to do with FOIP and PIPA, and that is, indeed, the protection of Albertans' information.

The Deputy Chair: Any other questions?

Sustainable Resource Development

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What I see here is that the supplementary amount of \$156,200,000 is requested to provide – and it's broken down – expense on firefighting, emergency spending for ground survey and control operations with regard to the mountain pine beetle infestation, concern about the budworm infestation, and approximately \$13 million for the disposal of tax recovery land. Could we begin by explaining to me the \$13,500,000 to provide for the disposal of tax recovery land? I'm not completely understanding what tax recovery land is. If you could explain that expenditure, please.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, quite simply, tax recovery land is a situation that happened mainly in southern Alberta. It probably would have been in the area of the mid- to late '30s, when a lot of farmland, particularly in southern Alberta, was left simply because people could not make a living on those pieces of real estate. What happened was that that real estate returned to the province of Alberta because the property taxes were not paid on the land. So we've been managing that land for that period of time, probably better than 60 years, a lot of it.

The situation, really, is that most of the land in question belongs to the municipalities. It was theirs at one point in time. The government ended up with it under this scheme of recovering the land because of unpaid taxes. So what we've done is that we've repatriated most of that land. About 80 per cent of it now has been returned to the municipalities on a nominal sum disposal, which means that each of the titles on those pieces of land is returned to the municipality for a dollar, but under our accounting rules we have to account for the value of the real estate. There's about 40 some-odd million dollars estimated that's left. We'd like to repatriate that over the next three or four years, and that's what the 13 and a half million dollars is for in this year's budget.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Thirty million dollars of emergency spending for continued ground survey and control operations to fight the mountain pine beetle infestation: does your ministry be-

lieve in selective logging and burning as methods of controlling infestation? Are they important tools? Can you explain, in terms of the \$30 million, how much of that would go into, say, clear-cutting versus selective logging? You know where I'm coming from. I have this selective logging prejudice, and I'm just wondering if you can divide up that \$30 million for me.

Mr. Knight: The issues here, Mr. Chairman, that we're talking about: when we talk about this business of clear-cut, the only time that that's really going to be effected by the program that we have to mitigate the damage from pine beetles is when we actually go in and work with our partners in the industry and look at their normal harvest plans. They adjust harvest plans into areas where, number one, there are either already beetle-killed or -damaged trees, and then we look at the next most possible host scenario. So we would move some of the logging program into areas where you would expect the beetles to move next to kind of eliminate that new home for them.

The \$30 million: most of that would be spent in two other areas that we use with this mitigation program. One of them, of course, is the idea of selective single-tree and small-stand removal, so what we would do is get people onto the ground there to cut and slash and burn the infected trees. We've got about 600 people on the ground now working in Alberta with respect to that. The balance of that money, Mr. Chairman, would be allocated to going out and doing surveys with respect to where the beetles are now, how well they're doing over the winter. That gives us a pretty good idea of where they may, you know, erupt next spring and what we should look for with respect to harvest plans.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. And I believe the carpentry adage of measure twice, cut once applies, so being proactive in terms of mapping out the potential areas of future infestation is a very sensible approach.

9:50

Could you give a sense of how much of this \$30 million supplementary that's set aside is being directed towards the Castle-Crown area, the mines area that you know and I know and I'm sure every member in this House knows from the number of letters we've received about the Beaver Mines area and concerns about how the preventative measures of potential clear-cutting are taking place? Is any of that \$30 million directed towards that specific Beaver Mines project?

Mr. Knight: Could you just repeat the end of that one?

Mr. Chase: Sure. I'd be glad to. Is any of that \$30 million directed towards pine beetle suppression and methodology in the Beaver Mines-Castle-Crown area? Is this taking up a significant amount or not?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that the area in question has been to the largest degree managed quite successfully, and I'm going to suggest that there could be some residual effect from people that are down there doing survey work. It would be difficult for me to put a number on it, but as I said, there are about 600 people working across the province now with respect to the mitigation of beetles. They could be in the area, but I wouldn't be able to answer that question directly now.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. We talked about the tax recovery land, and we brought up the Dirty Thirties, basically, where people abandoned their land for a variety of reasons: a series of depressing years, bad harvests, wind erosion, et cetera. There was a tremendous concern. In that same time period, Mr. Minister, the area of the Castle-Crown, the area that we've proposed, the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp, was part of Waterton national park, and for whatever reason, the federal government gave that land back to the province. Is any of the money that's been set aside here for at least studies about the potential of achieving that Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp Castle-Crown protection? Even if it's just for studies, I'd be appreciative of knowing that there was a consideration of the potential of creating that parkland.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, the money that we're going to use with respect to tax recovery is all pieces of real estate that are now in municipalities and under provincial control. There would be about – again, this is a number but it's close – 3,700 or 3,800 acres of real estate that are actually part of the old tax recovery lands that will not be repatriated to municipalities. They will be kept as public land because of their environmental and ecological value to the public of Alberta. Other than that, the money that we have earmarked is a writedown of real estate that will be transferred to municipalities.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. And I'm not trying to entrap you. I was just making a connection between the 1930s. What I was asking: is any of this \$30 million that is going towards pine beetle infestation controls, studies, and so on, looking at the possibility of Sustainable Resource Development turning the land in the Castle-Crown area into a potential protected area? That's what I'm asking. I referenced the recovery land just because it's the same time period, 1930. We lost that land.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, what we have here is that we've got an issue. In 2006 and again in 2009 there were major influxes of mountain pine beetles from British Columbia, something that was very unusual in the province of Alberta. We've had more or less a natural cycle of mountain pine beetles in the province, and it has been about a once in a 25- or 30- or 40-year kind of cycle. We get a few. They last normally a winter or two or three, the populations deteriorate, and that's the end of it for a while. These influxes of huge, huge numbers, probably hundreds of millions of pine beetles that came over from British Columbia, created a circumstance for us in Alberta.

What we've done with any and all of this money – and now we're probably up in the 300-plus million dollars that we've invested for Albertans into the protection of our forests in Alberta. The whole program is, quite simply, Mr. Chairman, to support an industry in Alberta that probably generates something in the neighbourhood of 8 and a half billion dollars a year for the province. The idea of this is to mitigate the damage with respect to the mountain pine beetle. The whole program is geared towards the mitigation of damage from mountain pine beetles.

You know, what may or may not happen with pieces of real estate after the fact is not really part of these estimates and is certainly not part of the mountain pine beetle mitigation strategy that we have.

Mr. Chase: I'm not trying to put words into the member's mouth. I am trying to put initiatives into your consideration, though.

One of the areas that has previously been hit in a fairly devastating way by the pine beetles was the Waterton parks area. In the

'70s a fairly significant devastation went through, but the government of that time did not try to mitigate the circumstance by clear-cutting the area, a significant amount of which was protected in Waterton national park. But in that same area in close proximity we've got the Beaver Mines, and we've got a number of people who are questioning the value of the timber versus the value of ongoing tourism activities in the area. We're getting a lot of mail on that. That's why I was asking if any of that \$30 million had to do with studies about how best to protect the land, not just now from pine beetles but in the future in terms of the land-use framework and designating what activities would be permitted in this Castle-Crown, which I am referring to by, hopefully, what the new name will be, the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp area.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, okay. This is going to be for the third time, I think, and maybe more than that; I'm not sure. But we'll do this one more time anyway.

We're talking about my supplementary estimates here, I presume. There's \$30 million in there, which the member opposite has mentioned on a number of occasions. The \$30 million is required because what happens with mountain pine beetles is that nobody that I am aware of actually really knows precisely how many of those particular pests are in the province of Alberta, exactly where they are, and where they might go next year. Only they know, but we don't know. So we actually don't know what amount of money to put in our annual budget in order to continue to mitigate the damage that's caused by this particular pest.

We ask for supplemental dollars, Mr. Chair, as we see this particular circumstance unfold, which is what we're seeing now. During the winter we send out people, we find and to the best of our ability destroy single stands and small stands of infected trees. We have another group of people on the ground that are actually out doing surveys with respect to where the beetles are, what their numbers are, what their likelihood of survival is, and where they may, you know, move next. So the \$30 million is spent with respect to the mitigation of the issue that we have around the infestation of mountain pine beetles in Alberta.

10:00

The Deputy Chairman: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate, as I've said before, the process of trying to scope out and plan into the future. Much appreciated.

I've asked, I guess, possibly twice what portion of that \$30 million would be invested in the Castle-Crown area of southern Alberta? Right now I would suggest that's the most controversial area in the province.

Then my next question, which may be easier to answer, is: why is this government spending \$13.5 million for the disposal of land? Is this the same land that it was recently announced was sold to municipalities for a dollar? I'm not sure why it cost \$13 million to give it away for a dollar.

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, if I may, you know, I have to tell you that I am in a wonderful spot right now, a very good spot. I'll tell you something. I have a tremendous amount of patience, and the reason that I know that is that my wife has told me I have never used any so far. So this is actually working for me; it really is.

I believe that we had an opportunity here – I don't know how long ago it was, but probably sometime within the last 20 minutes I have indicated what tax recovery land is and why we were required to have the money available in order for us to offset in our books the value of land. We're not buying anything. We're not buying a thing.

What we're doing is repatriating land to municipalities that was in municipal control at one point in time but reverted to the government because of nonpayment of taxes. Actually, for most of that land, Mr. Chairman, this was at a time when some of these regions were not actually registered or incorporated as municipalities, so they were improvement districts. There wasn't actually an entity for this real estate to go back to, so it reverted to the provincial government because we were in fact in control of the IDs. So we ended up with this real estate. In the meantime, what's happened with it is that we've leased it out as grazing leases. Some of it has just been left and kept as conservation areas and different things like that. There's been a program since 1963 or '64 to repatriate this real estate, and it's been going on since that time.

So, Mr. Chairman, what we have here is a situation where we want to continue and tidy up the repatriation of the remaining pieces of tax recovery land. We're not buying anything; we're just returning this land. For the Auditor General and the way our bookkeeping works we're required to account for the value of that real estate.

Mr. Chase: I appreciate your patience, and I appreciate your explanation. I'll try to come at it from a different way. We talked about the repatriation of the land. Supplemental supply required this year: \$13.5 million. Do you anticipate through the repatriation process that this number will go down gradually from year to year as the municipalities take over a significant amount of the responsibility for the usage or leasing of this land?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Chairman, no. It doesn't necessarily go down and down and down. What's going to happen or what could happen – you know, if we had the capability in government to transfer all of this land next year, then of course this particular issue, this budget item, would go up. It depends on what pieces of real estate we're able to transfer and what value is assigned to them.

As I indicated earlier, over the next period of about three years, perhaps four years, all of the remaining pieces of real estate will be transferred, and at that point this budget number down the road in three or four years will be a big, fat zero. Nothing. It's on our books because we're moving the real estate and we have to account for it. We're not buying anything, and it doesn't have any kind of ratchet where it goes down over time.

The Deputy Chair: Any further questions?

Tourism, Parks and Recreation

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Chair, \$500,000 for support of the ministry's information technology infrastructure, \$1,200,000 to support Edmonton's 2017 Expo bid, and \$2,581,000 for parks, including the replacement and repairs of park facilities and snow grooming. My questions: what changes in the ministry's information technology systems will be supported by the \$500,000 supplementary appropriation? Why was this amount not budgeted for in the 2010-11 estimates? Is the need a result of an information technology failure, or are we enhancing the system? An explanation.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. The hon. member is correct. We did request in supplementary estimates an additional \$500,000 for unplanned computer and IT infrastructure costs. As you know, our department has been moving under the GOA with Service Alberta, and those were the costs that it cost us to be in that system and to

continue to operate. Those were unplanned at the time that we debated the budget, and that was the additional cost for us to come under that system.

Mr. Chase: Is it a reasonably safe assumption that that was primarily a one-off cost of moving into that ministry? Okay. Thank you. I note the affirmative head shaking, so I'll move to my next question.

Why is the government requesting supplementary funds for park maintenance and repair when facility spending was reduced in last year's budget? It's the Peter-Paul scenario: we take away, and then we give back, and blessed be.

Mrs. Ady: Basically, hon. member, you're right. There was a transfer going on there. We had a few things that came up this year that we took out of operations. They were fairly small items to keep the parks repaired in the area of safety. As well, we had some equipment that groomed trails that broke down and could not be repaired, so it was decided at that time that we needed to replace that equipment. These are very small items, so that's why that transfer was done, again within the parks budget: small, not larger than \$5 million, but critical to the safety and protection in parks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I realize that the summer and fall utilization of parks is considerably larger than what takes place in the winter. In fact, a number of parks are actually closed. Have I just explained why there is no supplementary supply for, say, conservation officers or park maintenance? Is it just because this is sort of viewed as off-season and, therefore, not requiring the funding? Thank you. I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to also thank the ministers. The procedure tonight was not to try and trick you or try and beat you down with incessant, sometimes you might think irrelevant, questions. It was to try and have an understanding of the funding. I do appreciate the ministers' patience, and I realize that at times it was tried, but it was appreciated. Thank you, ministers, for your willingness to provide answers, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any further questions for the ministers? None?

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2010-11 General Revenue Fund

The Deputy Chair: The discussion is concluded, and I will now call the following questions after considering the 2010-2011 supplementary supply estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011.

Agreed to:

Aboriginal Relations	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$32,575,000
Advanced Education and Technology	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$24,400,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$53,900,000

10:10

Children and Youth Services	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$70,800,000
Culture and Community Spirit	
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$2,629,000
Capital Investment	\$371,000

Employment and Immigration		Advanced Education and Technology: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$24,400,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$53,900,000.
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$65,244,000	
Environment		Children and Youth Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$70,800,000.
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$1,670,000	
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$12,803,000	
Infrastructure		Culture and Community Spirit: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,629,000; capital investment, \$371,000.
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$57,600,000	
Justice		Employment and Immigration: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$65,244,000.
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$9,460,000	
Municipal Affairs		Environment: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$1,670,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$12,803,000.
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$190,974,000	
Seniors and Community Supports		Infrastructure: nonbudgetary disbursements, \$57,600,000.
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$70,150,000	
Service Alberta		Justice: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$9,460,000.
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$11,573,000	
Sustainable Resource Development		Municipal Affairs: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$190,974,000.
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$156,200,000	
Tourism, Parks and Recreation		Seniors and Community Supports: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$70,150,000.
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$2,981,000	
Amounts to be transferred		Service Alberta: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$11,573,000.
Solicitor General and Public Security		Sustainable Resource Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$156,200,000.
Capital Investment	\$25,112,000	
Treasury Board		Tourism, Parks and Recreation: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,981,000.
Capital Investment	(\$25,112,000)	

The Acting Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

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

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Mitzel in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona.

Mr. Quest: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2010-11 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, have been approved.

Aboriginal Relations: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$32,575,000.

The Committee of Supply has also approved the following amounts to be transferred.

Transfer to Solicitor General and Public Security: capital investment, \$25,112,000.

Transfer from Treasury Board: capital investment, (\$25,112,000).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly now adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:18 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Table of Contents

Monday evening, February 28, 2011

Committee of Supply

Supplementary Supply Estimates 2010-11, General Revenue Fund

Aboriginal Relations.....	91
Advanced Education and Technology	92
Children and Youth Services	95
Culture and Community Spirit.....	97
Employment and Immigration.....	98
Environment	102
Infrastructure	102
Justice	103
Municipal Affairs	103
Seniors and Community Supports	105
Service Alberta	105
Sustainable Resource Development.....	107
Tourism, Parks and Recreation.....	109
Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2010-11, General Revenue Fund	109

If your address is incorrect, please clip on the dotted line, make any changes, and return to the address listed below. To facilitate the update, please attach the last mailing label along with your account number.

Subscriptions
Legislative Assembly Office
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 Street
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4

Last mailing label:

Account # _____

New information:

Name:

Address:

Subscription information:

Annual subscriptions to the paper copy of *Alberta Hansard* (including annual index) are \$127.50 including GST if mailed once a week or \$94.92 including GST if picked up at the subscription address below or if mailed through the provincial government interdepartmental mail system. Bound volumes are \$121.70 including GST if mailed. Cheques should be made payable to the Minister of Finance.

Price per issue is \$0.75 including GST.

Online access to *Alberta Hansard* is available through the Internet at www.assembly.ab.ca

Subscription inquiries:

Subscriptions
Legislative Assembly Office
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
Telephone: 780.427.1302

Other inquiries:

Managing Editor
Alberta Hansard
1001 Legislature Annex
9718 – 107 St.
EDMONTON, AB T5K 1E4
Telephone: 780.427.1875