



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Fourth Session

# Alberta Hansard

Tuesday, March 22, 2011

Issue 17

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

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

Fourth Session

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## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 22, 2011

[The Speaker in the chair]

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Let us keep ever mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work let us find strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Blackett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a Calgary MLA I don't often get the opportunity to receive visiting students, so it's with great pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 81 grade six students from St. Basil Catholic school, located in my constituency of Calgary-North West. Accompanying the students are teachers Anil Dolan, Carolyn Krahn, and Marianne Murray, along with 18 parent chaperones. Although this school has not yet been seated in the members' and public galleries as they will be joining us shortly from 2 to 3 p.m. to observe today's question period, I would still ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a group of 41 students that are here from the Battle River-Wainwright constituency. Specifically, they come from Blessed Sacrament school in Wainwright. They are accompanied today by three teachers and helpers: Mrs. Michelle Folk, Mrs. Michelle Nantias, and Mr. Rene Rajotte. These teachers always invite me to come in and do a mock Legislature, and I get to spend a couple of hours with these students because I was a teacher. In nine years the most enjoyable part of this job is when I get to go back into the classroom. I understand groups 1 and 2 are seated behind me in the members' gallery, and group 3 is seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mrs. Sarich:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and a privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly visitors from the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. There are 24 bright and wonderful students, filled with passion for education, from Northmount elementary school, where they work towards providing a safe, positive learning environment in which students as lifelong learners develop their skills, knowledge, and attitudes to become responsible, caring, and productive citizens. They are joined today by their teacher, Mrs. Krystal Lim. I would ask them now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour and a privilege to introduce the 45 students and parents from the Percy Baxter school. They are seated in the members' and public galleries. Today was one of those testimonies to the bus driver. We had some whiteouts between Whitecourt and Edmonton, and he got here safely with the students and I'm sure will get safely back to Whitecourt. I'd ask them now to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Bhardwaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you individuals who have travelled here from India on a trade mission to explore Alberta and the many opportunities we have to offer. They are Sukhdev Singh, Sikandar Singh, and Harnek Singh, visiting on behalf of the Pearl Group of companies. Their visit was initiated following the Premier's mission to India in November 2010. Joining them today are local prominent members Yash Sharma, editor of *Asian Tribune*; and Atul Seth, a local accountant. At this time they're all standing. I'd like to ask the Assembly to give them a traditional warm welcome.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Little Bow.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a few of the councillors from Vulcan county. They're up for the AAMD and C. We had a luncheon get-together with the guys. As they have their names announced, I'd ask that they please rise. There are Councillor Ian Donovan from the Mossleigh area; Councillor Rick Geschwendt from Champion, whose family just got the 100-year Century farm award last year; Councillor Rod Ruark from north of Vulcan; CAO Leo Ludwig, the new administrator, who is a former classmate of our Member for Edmonton-Manning; and, of course, our new reeve, Dave Schneider, from the Vulcan area. I see that they're standing. Would you please give them a warm welcome? Enjoy the AAMD and C.

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

**Mr. Doerksen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today a friend of mine who I haven't met for about 20 years and happened to meet in the cafeteria downstairs today. Walt Wiens drove a coach-load of young people up here from Cochrane today. Walt is a former owner of Braman Furniture in Lethbridge and a friend of mine. As I said, it was a happy circumstance that we met today. I'd like to ask Walt to rise and enjoy the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you a good friend, a long-time acquaintance, and someone I've spent a lot of time with, Mr. Leo Ludwig, who is now working in the county of Vulcan.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

**Mr. Amery:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests from the great constituency of Calgary-East. Mr. Khushroop Gill relocated to Calgary from India approximately nine years ago, and he tells me that Alberta is the best place in

the world in which to work, live, and raise a family. Also, we have Mr. Jag Goodoo, who is no stranger to many members of this Assembly. He was a great friend to the late hon. Harry Sohal. Mr. Goodoo in 1994-95 was the first private Albertan to voluntarily donate 5 per cent of his pay to the elimination of the budget deficit. They're both seated in the public gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly the awesome Albertans who come to participate and to watch what goes on in this House. I'd like to ask James Cole, the president of the Calgary-Elbow constituency, to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

### Members' Statements

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

#### Whitecourt Health Care Centre X-ray Unit

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently it was announced that there will soon be a new X-ray machine at the Whitecourt health care centre. This was welcome news to my constituency. The new equipment will help ensure that residents of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne are able to access the health care and services they need. This new machine will provide consistent and reliable services to patients in the Whitecourt area and will be easier for staff to operate.

Through infrastructure maintenance programs Alberta Health Services maintains over 120 health care sites and approximately 500 buildings throughout the province. Providing new equipment like this X-ray unit is a priority for Alberta Health Services and this government. Alberta Health Services is strategically investing in the health system to support patients and communities like Whitecourt to stay healthy and to manage illness effectively.

I'd like to thank not only the current health minister but his predecessor for all their care and concern for my constituents and for taking the time to visit the health care facilities within Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Lastly, I'd like to thank all the health care workers not only in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne but throughout the province for their excellent work and caring and dedication.

Thank you, sir.

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

#### Seniors' Care

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government brags about how they're taking care of our seniors in this province. They brag about how they're increasing continuing care spaces. They tweet about how they're improving access and opening more assisted living beds. What they don't brag about are the seniors that can't stay in assisted living or don't belong there in the first place.

What do you do with an 86-year-old senior in assisted living who is lashing out at his spouse both verbally and physically because of dementia? What do you do with a senior with incontinence problems? What do you do with a senior who spends hours wandering the hall looking for their home, not realizing that they moved months ago? These are our beloved seniors that have fallen through the cracks.

**1:40**

This government insists that seniors should be in assisted living and not long-term care. Proof is in their action. No additional long-term cares have been built in years. ASL homes charge \$20 for a bath, \$500 for incontinence management, and \$7 to be escorted for their meals. Seniors are being nickelled and dimed so that this government can pinch pennies. If a senior belongs in long-term care, put them in long-term care. The government needs to be clear: assisted living is not long-term care.

What's going on doesn't save money for seniors or government. Hospital beds cost \$250,000 per year while long-term care beds cost about \$60,000. Our ER and long-term care backlogs could be solved if we built the right beds, giving the seniors the right care at the right time and in the right place. This government needs to educate itself on the difference between assisted living and long-term care. This government needs to be honest to Albertans and do what's right for seniors.

I want to thank the families and health care professionals that do an exceptional job of providing care for all of our seniors. Day in and day out they make sure that our seniors, who have given so much to Alberta, receive the care in return.

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

#### World Water Day

**Mr. Doerksen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is World Water Day. World Water Day was established by the United Nations in 1993 to recognize the importance of fresh water and promote effective water management. The theme or focus this year is Water for Cities or, I would suggest, water for people. The objective of World Water Day 2011 is to focus international attention on the impact of rapid urban population growth, industrialization, and uncertainties caused by variables like climate, people conflicts, and natural disasters on urban water systems. This is the first time in human history that most of the world's population live in cities, 3.3 billion people, and the urban landscape continues to grow.

Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate to live in Alberta, where we have access to some of the safest drinking water in the world. As such, I want to focus on some of the positive and forward-looking initiatives we have in Alberta to manage this important resource responsibly. Advanced water treatment facilities to serve our cities, regional systems to support smaller communities, and Alberta's groundwater mapping projects are important initiatives. Responsible and efficient management of water by industry and agriculture accommodates expanded use of water as Alberta grows. Important and forward-looking land-use planning around Alberta's watersheds will further secure the long-term availability and efficient use of fresh water for people in this province. These ongoing commitments are part of Water for Life, Alberta's strategy to safeguard and manage our water resources today and in the future. It is our commitment to ensure safe, secure drinking water and healthy aquatic ecosystems in our province.

Mr. Speaker, World Water Day serves to remind us of our shared responsibility to protect water resources now and for future generations.

Thank you.

#### Health Care System Strengths

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight some more strengths of health care in Alberta. Our province dedicates the highest amount per capita for health of any Canadian province. Alberta pays \$4,712 per capita, far exceeding the national average

of \$3,673. We've been successful in attracting the best and brightest in medical fields by having the best-paid doctors in Canada and among the best-paid nurses.

Alberta has funded top-quality, internationally competitive health research for the last 30 years, bringing leading-edge clinical treatments to Albertans and to others around the world. For example, our hospitals provide advanced organ and tissue transplant procedures. Last year the University of Calgary researchers made the first-ever documented transplant of living cartilage into a shoulder and also made extending the life of donor cartilage tissue possible. Alberta's researchers lead their fields in areas like cardiovascular health, brain development and health, diabetes, biomedical technologies, infectious diseases, and bone and joint health.

Alberta research has improved wait times for health and knee replacements, helped to treat antibiotic infections like the virulent hospital bug *Clostridium difficile*, allowed scientists to communicate with the brain, and saved heart-damaged babies' lives. Alberta has taken a leadership position in the treatment of diabetes with several advancements in programs, including performing the first insulin-producing islet transplants, greatly reducing patient need for insulin, and programs like the mobile diabetes screening initiative and the Alberta monitoring for health program which assists low-income Albertans with their diabetic supplies.

I could continue, Mr. Speaker, but as you can see, the publicly funded universal health care system in Alberta is strong and innovative and continues to be on track to be the best performing health care system in all of Canada.

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

#### Continuing Care for Seniors

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 2011 marks the first year that baby boomers start turning 65. By 2030 1 out of 5 Albertans will be seniors, and just as our demographics are changing so, too, is our way of doing things. Today seniors are more independent and healthier than previous generations. Albertans have told us their preference is to age in their own homes and in homelike settings in the community.

In November we released our five-year health action plan, and one of the strategies is to provide more choice in continuing care. Mr. Speaker, as part of that plan we are adding 5,300 continuing care spaces over the next five years, but providing more spaces is just one aspect of the strategy. More than 107,000 Albertans receive home-care services, allowing them to remain independent for as long as possible. We are expanding and adjusting home care. In this year's budget we announced an expansion of home-care hours to allow at least 3,000 more people to receive services.

We are increasing support to caregivers. We are developing pilot projects that remove barriers and use technology to help seniors age in their own homes and close to their communities. The emergency to home pilot project in several emergency departments throughout the province links emergency department home-care co-ordinators with seniors in the ED to ensure that those who can return home have the support services they need to do so.

The neighbours helping neighbours initiative partners volunteers with seniors or those with disabilities to help them with everyday tasks and to keep them connected with their communities. We are also launching a project that tests new technologies aimed at providing increased safety for those who live on their own.

Mr. Speaker, we are building a stronger, more integrated province-wide health system that will be sustainable for years to come, a health system that will help deliver quality care to Albertans.

#### Castle Special Management Area

**Mr. Chase:** Assault on the Castle. Mr. Speaker, each day of this spring session I have tried and will continue to place on the record the names of the over 1,000 individuals who have contacted my office regarding the devastation being allowed to take place in the Castle-Crown by this government either overtly through clear-cut logging, euphemistically referred to as block cutting, where species-unique old-growth forest is turned into a checkerboard of cuts under the pretense of pine beetle control, or subvertly by having insufficient staff available to arrest the off-road outlaws whose illegally carved trails further scar the landscape throughout large sections of the Castle.

In question period, during budget debates, through tablings, and now as a member's statement on behalf of all outraged Albertans I am calling this government to account. As they were with Bill 29, the Alberta Parks Act, which proposed to take governance out of the Legislature to behind closed ministerial doors, Alberta's citizens are similarly opposed to allowing the SRD minister dictatorial control of their Crown land and, in many cases, their livelihoods.

In addition to the numerous communications I and other government MLAs have received but have yet to table, several newspaper articles have been written about this government's ongoing assault on the Castle and demanding that the area be restored to protective status through the establishment of the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp wilderness park. Among the journalists who have answered the call of the Castle and raised the alarm are Kelly Cryderman of the *Herald*, Bill Kaufmann of the *Sun*, Dave Mabell and Gerald Gauthier of the *Lethbridge Herald*, Rose Sanchez of the *Prairie Post*, Lorne Fitch, a biologist, in a *Pincher Creek Echo* article and the *Nanton News*.

Examples of government's centralization, exploitation, and behind-closed-doors mismanagement are growing daily. As a local physician recently noted: sunshine is the best antiseptic, to which I would add that a large voter turnout would provide the best cure.

#### Oral Question Period

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

#### Health Quality Council Review

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, a doctor a day continues to come forward with damning allegations of intimidation, yet this Premier continues to duck and dive and dodge questions in the House. Well, Mr. Premier, you can't hide forever, and you can't rely on your damage control strategy of referring everything to the Health Quality Council as a quick fix, hoping the problem goes away. Albertans see through the government's blatant attempt at PR spin and damage control. Mr. Premier, what are you hiding, and who are you protecting by avoiding the calls for an independent inquiry?

1:50

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, we are going to have an independent inquiry. That is going to be done by the Health Quality Council under some very, very robust terms of reference that they themselves wrote. They'll be conducting their review based on those terms of reference.

**Dr. Swann:** To restore public confidence is to call an independent public inquiry. The Premier knows this. If you won't, please tell

Albertans why restoring public confidence in our health care system is not a priority of yours.

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Health Quality Council will conduct a full review. We asked them to conduct a full review of wait times in emergency rooms and also look at cancer surgery. Given their terms of reference, that they wrote, they'll be able to listen to any evidence that comes forward from any individual, any Albertan that might want to bring evidence forward to the Health Quality Council.

**Dr. Swann:** Well, can the Premier explain how the Health Quality Council is going to subpoena people and records?

**Mr. Stelmach:** I would think that with the list that the hon. member provided the other day, these physicians – and there may be some, perhaps, nurses and other health care providers – will come forward to the Health Quality Council and deliver their evidence. It will be done in full confidence and in complete impartiality.

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

#### Health Care Ethics and Compliance

**Dr. Swann:** Mr. Speaker, the Tories continue to add insult to injury by insisting that health professionals are free to speak and then referring to the code of conduct. What they neglect to mention is that every avenue of raising concerns leads to the same destination: the ethics and compliance officer. This officer happens to be the former legal counsel of Capital Health and has had a record of brushing away legitimate concerns of health professionals. Again to the Premier: how can you say that the old culture of intimidation is gone from Alberta Health Services when the same people are still in senior positions calling the shots?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the people that are assigned responsible positions within Alberta Health Services have delivered those services extremely well. They have a huge responsibility. They're trying to resolve a lot of the issues. I know that one of the issues brought forward yesterday was the complaints by two nurses. That is public. It was on the website. There's nothing there to hide. Anybody and any Albertan can look at what is on the website with respect to the complaint from the nurses.

**Dr. Swann:** Mr. Speaker, this Premier continues to insist that there's a comprehensive process when everything eventually ends up in the hands of one person: that ethics and compliance officer who has been there for a decade. How do you explain that, Mr. Premier? How can people have confidence?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Actually, when a person has been in a position for that period of time, he must be doing a good job and be qualified to do that. You know, I'm sure that the individual in question must have heard many individual cases that have come forward and used best judgment to listen to both sides and make the decision at the end of the day.

**Dr. Swann:** Given that the closed-door review cannot compel witnesses nor grant immunity to witnesses nor subpoena documents, will the Premier finally allow a public inquiry, or is he waiting to be tipped off on the next damning case of complaint?

**Mr. Stelmach:** As I said, Mr. Speaker, we'll continue with the Health Quality Council review. The terms of reference are in place, and the review will start. The first report will be in about

three months, the secondary report in about six months, and the final report within nine months. We'll know within three months which direction the Health Quality Council is heading.

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

#### Provincial Environmental Monitoring Panel

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The 2009 Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act was to take the politics out of appointments to government agencies, boards, and committees. Now I understand why it languishes in legislative purgatory and was never proclaimed, because here we are with another Tory buddy appointed to the water monitoring panel, a buddy that is now being investigated by the RCMP. To the Premier: why did the government feel it was acceptable to overlook the conflict-of-interest issues and appoint a friend to the water monitoring panel in the first place?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, the panel that was appointed included a number of experts from a number of various fields. The member in question was appointed because he is the executive director of the Canada School of Energy and Environment and brings expertise to the panel that would have been very beneficial such as having an in-depth knowledge of the kind of research that is going on at the various institutions, academic and otherwise, across the entire country.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, he's now on leave from that committee as well.

Back to the Premier. Was it worth it to appoint a friend when it could irreparably damage the credibility of the recommendations of that committee?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the suggestion that somehow this was an appointment of a friend I think is ludicrous. I've just explained the reason why the appointment was made. Does this member think that the most recent allegations were known to this minister when the appointment was made? It's a ridiculous suggestion to think that the recent allegations came into part of that decision.

**Ms Blakeman:** Well, Mr. Speaker, if that act had been in place, maybe they would have known.

Back to the Premier. Won't the fact that the panel is mired in controversy and short a member for an undetermined period of time impact the ability of the board to fulfill its mandate?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, this member is suggesting that this board somehow is not going to be able to fulfill its mandate. I would suggest to her that that's simply not true. There are extremely capable people on that board. The co-chairs, Mr. Kvisle and Dr. Tennant: I have the utmost faith that they will be able to work with the rest of the members of that panel and come forward with very, very credible recommendations.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

#### Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Lloyd Maybaum spoke out for his patients. Good for him. Superboard officials, again using intimidation and bullying, said, and I quote: we want his head on a platter. The minister of health actually, in

fairness, had an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and send a strong message that your government does not tolerate this type of behaviour, but the minister did absolutely nothing. Why does this minister continue to support intimidation and bullying of Alberta doctors and nurses by his nonaction?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, nobody in the government supports anything of that kind whatsoever. There's a very clear policy that was signed by a three-way group last June. I will repeat it again. It suggests very strongly that it is doctors' duty and responsibility to advocate on behalf of their patients. There was an open letter to physicians signed by the Alberta Health Services leadership just a couple of weeks back here suggesting exactly the same thing. There's also a change to the medical staff bylaws to ensure that that does not happen again.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given your other failure to take action, based on that response my next question is: how can you say to Alberta doctors and nurses that they should feel free to come forward and speak out based on what you have said in the past?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, because it is in their Hippocratic oath in slightly different words. It's also in the bylaws. It's also in the letters that I've just enunciated.

I think the other thing that's important here is for us to turn this page, to move on and get on with the excellent services that are needed today and tomorrow. Not much we can do about the past, Mr. Speaker, where they continue to live.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister wants the issue to die – I don't, nor do Albertans – my third question is to the Premier. Given the dark cloud of intimidation hanging over the government, through the chair to the Premier: will you take full action now and show leadership before you retire and call a public inquiry for the benefit of Albertans?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of all Albertans again I'll refer to the letter, as I did yesterday, which went out to Dr. Maybaum. It says very clearly: this is not a matter of forcing you to be quiet, but it is a matter of teamwork and leadership. That to me is not some sort of intimidation of a physician that's coming forward and speaking out from his area of expertise.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, if you quoted from a document in your first question, would you kindly table it at the appropriate time?

To the Premier: you quoted from a letter. I don't know if that's been tabled or not, but I would expect it to be.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

## 2:00 Health Quality Council Review (continued)

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we know that this Tory government is the most secretive in Canada, and we also know that this culture of secrecy has seeped down into the health care system, intimidating front-line health care professionals from speaking out on behalf of their patients. To clear the air about the role of the Minister of Health and Wellness, will the Premier ask him to testify in public before the so-called hearing of the Health Quality Council?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, last week the Health Quality Council issued very rigorous terms of reference. They will be conducting their inquiry based on those terms of reference. I'm eager for the committee to get going in terms of listening to the evidence that's going to come forward. Once again it's about waiting times in surgery and also with respect to ER, but they've also expanded the terms of reference so that if any physician or health care provider wants to come forward with any ideas or what happened in the past, they're free to do so.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, the Energy minister, the current Minister of Health and Wellness, and Mr. Gary Mar, PC leadership candidate, were all health ministers during this period of intimidation of health care professionals, will the Premier formally request his colleagues to appear before his so-called public hearing of the Health Quality Council and give testimony in public?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, the Health Quality Council will conduct the hearings, and they will conduct them in the manner that they feel is the best to get the most information out.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Mason:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, will he ask his colleagues, then, to volunteer, I guess is my given?

Given again that the culture of intimidation took place first when Mr. Gary Mar was the minister of health, will he formally request Mr. Mar appear before the so-called hearing at the Health Quality Council and give public testimony?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, I do have the five copies of the appropriate tabling, and I'm going to quote from one of them.

Despite all of our challenges in Alberta, we continue to provide a high standard of medical care and public health services and programs to all Albertans. It is time to reflect on these blessings; we are incredibly fortunate.

And so I respectfully submit that it is time for us all to move forward and to continue to rebuild the excellence that we have previously seen in our public health and other health services in Alberta.

That is from Dr. Ameeta Singh, which is in a letter to the *Edmonton Journal*.

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

## Emergency Room Wait Times

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, following up to the Premier, the Canadian Institute for Health Information just released a report on wait times for six procedures like heart bypass surgery. While the rest of Canada is making progress, Alberta is the only province that has either made no headway or in some ways is getting worse. To the Premier: why does the Premier continue to claim we have the best performing health system when the facts show that we lag behind the rest of Canada?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Actually, Mr. Speaker, he's wrong. According to the information I have from the report that came out, the benchmark right across Canada is 99, and we're lower than 99. There is a lot of room for improvement – there's no doubt about it – in all of the areas. But to say that we're the worst in Canada is absolutely ridiculous.

**Dr. Swann:** Mr. Speaker, the new data parallels the lack of progress on lengths of stay and wait times in emergency rooms. When will the Premier heed our call to open mothballed facilities and mobilize additional staffing and relieve pressure on the ERs?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, that's what we've been doing for the last couple of months. There will be 3,200 more cataract surgeries done. There will be more staff hired. In fact, with \$2.6 billion in our three-year capital plan a lot of hospitals will be completed later in 2011 and in the beginning of 2012, that will add even more room for the many new Albertans that continue to move here to the province from Ontario, B.C., and other countries.

**Dr. Swann:** Mr. Premier, will you restore confidence in the system and call a public inquiry now?

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the Health Quality Council is prepared to begin its review. Again it was directed to look at cancer wait times, look at emergency room waiting times, but they've also expanded their terms of reference to hear from all Albertans in terms of those that are providing health care to come forward with ideas on how to improve the system, and if there was something that happened in the past, they can very easily bring that to the Health Quality Council. There are physicians that are interested in hearing what others are saying about the health system.

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

#### Income Support for Emergency Housing

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From time to time situations arise where unexpected tragedy strikes Albertans and their homes are destroyed or otherwise uninhabitable, instances such as the evacuation of the Penhorwood condominiums in Fort McMurray or the fire on the weekend at the apartment complex in north Edmonton. My question to the Minister of Employment and Immigration: in situations like this, what does your ministry do?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in situations like these or, frankly, in any situation where an Albertan finds himself in financial peril, Alberta Works benefits dispensed through this ministry, through the 59 offices that we have throughout the province, provide benefits such as damage deposits, rental arrears, utility arrears, utility payments, or other emergency benefits subject to eligibility. Obviously, as stewards of taxpayers' dollars we make sure that those Albertans who need those benefits, that assistance, will receive it.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. When people are suddenly displaced, they do need help. What types of situations do the benefits you just mentioned cover?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this actually gives me an opportunity to extend my gratitude to our staff throughout the entire province. As a matter of fact, during any emergency, no matter when it happens, in the middle of the night, or where it happens, our staff make sure to be there on the site of the emergency to offer immediate assistance and to make Albertans aware of the plethora of benefits that may be available to them. For example, in the condominium situation and our recent fire in Edmonton our

staff would be on-site at the time of evacuation, or whatever the peril is, and make themselves available to provide that immediate assistance.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Quest:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: so what level of benefits are provided to these people that you're talking to on-site?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, that would vary based on the situation. Obviously, every applicant, Albertan, must apply or must exhibit their need to one of our staff. Their eligibility is evaluated based on what their financial situation happens to be. As stewards of public dollars we will always provide assistance to those who truly need it and show that they need it. As I indicated earlier, basic expenses are taken care of by the department for those Albertans who need that help.

#### Noninstructional Postsecondary Tuition Fees

**Dr. Taft:** Mr. Speaker, despite this government's earlier promise that the cost of postsecondary tuition fees would be capped at the rate of inflation, the minister of advanced education has allowed professional faculties at both the U of A and the U of C to significantly raise tuition fees. Further, he's allowing a growing list of institutions to charge mandatory noninstructional fees that are little more than end runs around tuition caps. To this minister: since students were previously consulted and then betrayed, where does he stand on tuition fee increases?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Weadick:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to stand and say that we're very pleased and proud that we do consult with our students. We work very closely with them on many of these issues. I can tell this member that they have not been betrayed. We continue to work with our students. It's critically important that they be at the table. There were six market modifiers that were approved last year that will come into effect later this year, that were supported by the student faculties in those areas, and they're there to help bring those schools in line with others similar.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, to the same minister: first, I'd ask him to table the details of that information; and then, since this minister told this Assembly on March 9 that he's been discussing ways that students could be involved in voting on noninstructional fees, will he confirm that those discussions are going to lead to binding votes?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. We've had discussions with the students around fees, and there are a number of different kinds of fees that are available through the school. Some of them are directly for sporting events, for those types of things, for use of athletic facilities, and those are between the students and the schools. The fees that seem to be causing the largest amount of angst are those fees which are simply for extra costs of operations, and those do not have support from this department. We believe that the CPI modifier is the appropriate way to handle tuition.

**Dr. Taft:** Well, there was a glimmer of hope in the minister's comments. I'd like to follow up on them. When he indicated that those mandatory noninstructional fees that do not have a direct tie

to any particular service are not supported by his department, will he, then, order colleges and universities and institutions around the province to stop that practice?

2:10

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're reluctant to simply across the board stop that practice. Right now our education system is based on access and quality, and we want to make sure that it's affordable but that the quality remains. We want to work with our institutions and with our students to make sure that we can keep those three pillars here. We don't want to tie the hands of all of our institutions, but we believe the students must be involved in helping to make those decisions, and we will continue to work with the students.

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

### Gravel Extraction Management

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sand and gravel rush is on in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Many applications for new projects are being made within my constituency. The overall land impacts, water impacts, and dust and noise concerns are causing a problem for my constituents. Counties are not able to respond to the issues being raised by the residents. My questions are all to the Minister of Environment. How is your department ensuring that the environment continues to be protected with the growing number of gravel pits in Alberta, especially within the Lac Ste. Anne county in my constituency?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, the initial responsibility for zoning lies at the local level, so the municipality makes a decision whether or not to zone for a gravel pit. Once that's taken place, the applicant must follow a prescribed code of practice that is designed to protect the environment. Larger operations require licences, and in the process of approving those licence applications, there is a great deal of effort on the part of my staff . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Well, getting a little closer to the situation, given that the Riparia resources application is currently before the department, how will the minister ensure that the residents in the area are properly consulted so that their concerns are fully understood and considered before this application is approved?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, on this particular application I understand that we have received an application along with a secondary application under the Water Act. It's currently undergoing our comprehensive environmental review, like all applications. This is an open and transparent process that requires public notification. I understand that to date six statements of concern have been received, and our staff will take into account these statements of concern plus all of the other environmental issues in their consideration of whether or not to approve the application.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how is the minister ensuring that appropriate decision-making now in the absence of a regional plan under the land-use framework is done?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, Mr. Speaker, every application is evaluated for potential impacts on the environment. Decisions that are made today use an existing process that ensures that we have the ultimate focus on protecting the environment. Once a regional plan comes into place, I would suggest that that will help to further inform the decision-makers about the achievement of locally determined outcomes that balance both development and the environment.

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

### Castle Special Management Area

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In freedom to exploit Alberta, private government-sanctioned greed consistently outweighs public good. Who you know in government trumps scientific evidence. Ironically, the greatest threat to sustainability is the minister of the moment. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: given the devastating environmental and economic costs of the 2003 Lost Creek fire, why would you expose the Castle to the heightened threat of tinder-dry clear-cutting this summer?

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the region that the hon. member talks about, there has been a program in place to manage the forest land use in that region. Probably better than 50 years of commercial logging operations have been going on there. A lot of the lovely, pristine trees that these folks are looking at today are actually ones that were put in place in reforestation projects 60 years ago.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Again to the Minister of SRD: is it your ministry's master plan to deliberately wipe out naturally diverse old-growth forest in the Castle in order to create more convenient, single-species tree farms for future harvesting? And don't give me the 60-year bit.

**Mr. Knight:** And don't keep standing over there and pointing at me.

Mr. Speaker, the situation with respect to the Castle is that two-thirds of that area is off limits to logging in the first place. Of the remaining one-third that is available to log, only 1 per cent per year will be logged, and it must be reforested according to Alberta law.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta law is limited. It's a farce.

Does the fact that 85 per cent of southern Albertans recently polled by the Lethbridge College are opposed to this government's clear-cutting of their environmental, recreational, and economic legacy mean nothing to this cut first, measure not government? Who's got your ear, Mr. Minister?

**Mr. Knight:** Mr. Speaker, who's got my ear is not the gentleman opposite. That was an interesting statement he made about the law in Alberta given that he's a lawmaker.

Mr. Speaker, the University of Lethbridge: we very much work with them with respect to watershed issues in the area and that type of thing. Another thing is that the studies that have been done relative to that issue and to the drainage that comes into the rivers in the area indicate that the rivers are in good-quality condition.

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

### Fish Population in the Bow River

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Downstream of Calgary the Bow River is one of the top trout fisheries in the whole world. Upstream as the Bow River runs through the constituency of Calgary-Bow: not so many fish. I have been told in the past that the reason there are fewer fish in my area is because the water is so clean that there are too few nutrients for the little bugs to grow, and the fish need these bugs for food. Now, a recent report has . . .

**The Speaker:** Sorry. The time has gone.  
The hon. minister.

**Mr. Knight:** Well, Mr. Speaker, we had so much interest in that question, and I think I actually have not a bad answer. According to the data that we have, fish populations are not declining in the Bow River within the city limits of Calgary. Current regulations allow limited fish harvest, but the latest information I have, in the creel assessment in 2006, is that the fish quantity and quality within the city limits of Calgary have remained as they have been for a number of years.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you. A few years ago I reviewed the data regarding nutrient load in the Bow River, and as it comes through Calgary-Bow, aside from flood conditions our water quality was excellent. To the Minister of Environment: has our water quality been improving or declining?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, if the member is referring to that reach of the Bow River immediately upstream of Calgary, I would suggest that it probably has been improving since we've improved the infrastructure that's in place for the management and the treatment of municipal sewer from Canmore and Cochrane.

I also have to point out that we also need to be concerned with the health of the rivers right across the entire province. There are concerns with respect to nutrient quality . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms DeLong:** No further supplementals. Thank you.

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

### Provincial Environmental Monitoring Panel

*(continued)*

**Ms Notley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Albertans learned that a member of the oil sands monitoring panel, so touted by the Minister of Environment, is under investigation by the RCMP for criminal lobbying activities. Can the Minister of Environment explain to Albertans why he did not immediately show leadership in completely removing Bruce Carson from the panel now and in the future and, more importantly, why he won't do so now?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, the last I heard is that in this country individuals are still innocent until proven guilty. I understand that allegations have been made and that an investigation is under way. Mr. Carson has offered his leave of absence. I have accepted that

leave of absence pending the outcome of the investigation. I think it's a perfectly appropriate response.

**Ms Notley:** Well, Mr. Speaker, given that Carson's fiancée has a financial stake from which she stands to earn tens of millions of dollars in a water treatment company, a company for which he has been lobbying, and given that this company would have a financial interest in monitoring on the Athabasca River, can the minister explain how he failed to suss out this obvious conflict before appointing Carson to his panel?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Carson was appointed to this panel in his capacity as executive director of the Canada School of Energy and Environment. It's not common practice for us to delve into that degree of personal scrutiny prior to making appointments of this nature.

2:20

**Ms Notley:** Well, definitely, the minister doesn't vet for conflict of interest. Given that the minister clearly doesn't vet for criminal records, will this minister admit that the only thing he does look for in his appointees to his sham of a panel is close connections to the Conservative Party?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, let me repeat what I said the first time. Allegations have been made. These allegations to date have not been substantiated, and an investigation is under way. At the conclusion of that investigation appropriate action will be taken.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-MacKay.

### Labour Protection for Paid Farm Workers

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A trucking company employee is in serious condition in hospital after machinery he was operating hit an overhead power line in Wetaskiwin on Saturday. To the Minister of Employment and Immigration: is occupational health and safety investigating this incident?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate when any Albertan gets hurt, be it on or off the job. I am not certain of the specifics of the particular accident she is referring to, but as always I extend a welcome to this member to contact my office. As a matter of fact, come in person to my office, tell me which file you're talking about, and I'll have it checked for you right away.

**Ms Pastoor:** Well, given that this incident probably merits – not probably; it does merit – an OHS investigation, why is it that OHS cannot investigate the deaths of two men who were electrocuted in December when machinery they were transporting from a farm hit an overhead power line?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Well, Mr. Speaker, it appears the member knew the answer to her first question; she just answered it, so maybe she will not want to meet with me.

The fact is that in any workplace where occupational health and safety applies, every single incident and accident is investigated duly, and the findings of those investigations are shared with my office. Again, if she is making a reference to a specific accident somewhere in Alberta, if she gives more accurate detail of which accident she is talking about, I will take a look into it.

**Ms Pastoor:** Well, it was a fairly publicized and fairly serious incident that happened last Saturday.

Is the safety of a farm worker worth so much less than the safety of any kind of worker in Alberta? Can the minister explain why Alberta is the only province in Canada – the only province in Canada – where farm employees are not covered in the same way by workplace laws?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, no one's life or health or safety is more important than another person's, obviously. The member knows very well that the Occupational Health and Safety Act does not apply to farms, and for that reason our minister of agriculture has put a program in place that will be assisting our farmers with matters of occupational health and safety on Alberta farms.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-MacKay, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

### Innovation Voucher Program

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have heard a lot lately about the importance of innovation in the Alberta economy. Initiatives like the innovation vouchers go a long way to boost innovation among smaller Alberta companies. However, I have been contacted by constituents concerned that this valuable program is being discontinued. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Why is this voucher program no longer accepting applications?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The innovation voucher program was indeed a very popular program. It was launched as a pilot program. It provided 350 companies in 44 communities with \$11 million to use towards innovation research. It was an extremely positive pilot. We're now reviewing that so that we can come forward with an even better program in the future, and it will be continuing to run into the future.

**Ms Woo-Paw:** My question is to the same minister. If the program is so positive and successful, can the minister tell us why we need the review?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was run as a pilot program. Through the project we have heard some issues around how to access it, some players that couldn't get access, and some of the research places that didn't receive any of the vouchers. Today in Calgary at the Nanotech Showcase I spoke with a gentleman who's developing a Band-Aid that can read your body vitals and your core temperature from a distance. That can be very positive. He received a voucher, but he said that some of the companies weren't available that could do the research, and he's looking forward to the next one.

**Ms Woo-Paw:** Again a question to the same minister. Would companies have an opportunity to provide input to the review?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Weadick:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what the review will do over the next couple of months: talk to those people that receive vouchers and some of the research that was provided and see if we can make this program a little easier to access. Sometimes we put programs in, and the paperwork can be onerous. It can be difficult to fill out for some smaller companies

and users. We want to make sure that this is streamlined and easy to access for Alberta companies.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

### Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals (continued)

**Mr. Hinman:** Mr. Speaker, again today this government has said that no investigation is necessary for the top officials who demanded the doctor's head on a platter. This government resembles a centralized autocratic regime. Municipal officials and PC MLAs know that if they criticize the government, they will pay a price even if their concerns are totally valid. This cripples our democratic system. To the minister of health: how can you not see that intimidating our health practitioners cripples our health care system also and that a public inquiry is the only way to clear the air?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I've had an opportunity to read this letter that is being referred to, and nowhere in here do I see anyone using the term "called for the head on a platter." What I see here is someone who at the time was a physician lead, who wrote a letter asking for his colleagues to take up the cause for more mental health capacity. I can assure the member that that is going to happen. I indicated yesterday that there are 33 beds planned for the new south Calgary health campus. Thirteen of them are brand new, additional capacity beds.

**Mr. Hinman:** Well, there's the problem. They don't follow up. It's in the paper. The quote was there. It's been tabled. A head on the platter isn't intimidating?

Given the explicit declaration in the superboard's original code of conduct that all health workers must fall in line and the repeated corroboration that has been coming out from individuals that have been reprimanded for advocating for the patients, will the minister explain why he uses military discipline to control our 90,000-strong army of health care workers?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's time for even that member in that party to get into the present tense. There is no such muzzling order in effect. What there is is an open policy that is now a duty to disclosure policy, so why they keep raising things from the past and inferring that they're still in place or perhaps never were in place I don't know. The fact is that today it's an open, transparent process that encourages doctors, nurses, and other health providers to speak out. You know what? They're listening, and they're responding appropriately.

**Mr. Hinman:** Mr. Speaker, this is a 1970s horror show. Triple D: deny, deny, deny. Given how many times the opposition has pointed this out to him, does the minister still not realize that the Health Quality Council is only capable of investigating health quality concerns, that the multiple allegations of workplace intimidation coming from the top of the health department calls for a public inquiry and a full . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I think the Health Quality Council has made it very clear that they have set precedent in this particular case because they have gone out there and designed their own terms of reference, and very soon we're expecting them to tell us who their panel members are going to be. None of us knows who that is. They're going to tell us who their health advisers might be.

I would warn this member to not mislead, miscommunicate, and misappropriate statements.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

### Education Property Tax

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today many Calgarians are wondering why they thought they were getting a cut in property tax only to find out the city of Calgary is moving in on the available tax base. This has many people scratching their heads, from taxpayers to school boards. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Has the government changed its policy on the collection of revenue via property tax so that municipalities like Calgary can collect more revenue?

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. We determine the amount of money that we're going to collect on behalf of Education, and we assess that equitably across Alberta municipalities. Whatever reason the city of Calgary feels it needs to raise taxes is a complete issue between the residents of the city of Calgary and their city council.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the reduced revenues have caused challenges to the provincial budget and given that Calgary taxpayers are not seeing a break in their property taxes this year, does the minister not think it's prudent to change this particular policy at this time?

2:30

**Mr. Snelgrove:** No. That was my first answer.

Mr. Speaker, we committed years ago to a tax structure around education that commits only to growth, and that's approximately 2 and a half per cent that we're adding this year. That is not to suggest that the city of Calgary isn't responsible to its own citizens or residents for its tax base. Whether they would assume it's because we didn't charge as much as we could have for education or for whatever reason, they are separate issues.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member. Third question.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Education. Given that the province is leaving \$47 million available in property tax revenue in Calgary and given that the Calgary board of education is facing close to a \$50 million shortfall in its budget, is the minister still committed to the policy that the education portion of the property tax is to provide basic support for Alberta's K to 12 education system?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The education property tax provides about 30 per cent of the cost of basic education to the system. It's not the full cost; it's about 30 per cent of it. It's about \$602 million from the city of Calgary during the 2011 year of the \$1.27 billion in provincial funding.

The reality is that in our education property tax we have increased the amount collected by the growth in assessment, not by the inflation value. I don't think citizens in Calgary would want us to grow our education property tax assessment because the value of their property grew by way of inflation. I think they would expect that we would capture that same tax from the growth in the assessment roll because of new houses and new businesses.

### Education Funding

**Mr. Hehr:** Mr. Speaker, like I indicated yesterday, the Education budget reads like an insurance agreement in that what the large print giveth, the small print taketh away. A 4.7 per cent increase in the top line looks impressive until cuts to school board grants are factored in. To the Minister of Education. School boards have indicated the results of cuts to the rural sustainability initiative and cuts to AISI. Teachers will have to be let go, and this will lead to higher student to teacher ratios in the classroom. Does the minister deny that this is a result of his budget?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, that could well be a result of the budget. There's no question that while the budget was increased by 4.7 per cent, which is an incredible amount of increase to the budget in any department, that's only \$258 million – only \$258 million – and in order to cover all the costs that are on the table, we needed about \$363 million. So we had to find targeted grants in the amount of about \$107 million. That is going to have an impact. When 98 per cent of our budget goes through the school boards, it will have an impact. But the other side of this equation is . . .

**The Speaker:** The hon. member, please.

**Mr. Hehr:** Given that the rural stabilization grant cuts will force schools like the one in Lougheed to close down and this will force kids to go to school in another jurisdiction, my question is again for the Education minister. How long of a school bus ride to the next community is acceptable to this minister?

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, how long of a school bus ride is acceptable is really a question for the local community. In my particular case I wouldn't want a child to have to ride for more than an hour any way, but that's my personal view.

The premise of the question is wrong. The budget is not forcing anybody to close a school. School boards decide the priority for their funding. School boards across the province have in excess of \$300 million of operating surplus, and if it's their priority, they can keep the schools open.

**Mr. Hehr:** The premise of the question is: who is providing the money for our local school boards? Is that you, Mr. Minister? If it is, are you providing them with ample funding?

**Mr. Hancock:** Well, I don't have that kind of money, Mr. Speaker, but the Alberta taxpayer wants to support education in this province and does support education in this province well, to the tune of \$6.2 billion a year. If you add the opted out, it's probably up around \$6.4 billion a year. It's an incredible amount of money for a very, very important function; that is, making sure that each and every child has an opportunity for a good education. We do have local school boards, and it's their job to make sure that the education system operates well for their local students.

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

### Foreign Qualifications and Credentials

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A newly released report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives talks about visible minorities in the workforce, and it says that on the whole they earn less than white Canadians. My first question is to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Why do we encourage immigrants

to come to Alberta if they are not going to be successful in the workforce?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, we encourage immigrants to come to Alberta because we know for a fact that we're walking into a perfect storm relative to worker shortages for many years to come. If we want to continue to enjoy the lifestyle that we have right now and the services that are available to us, we will need workers, and many of them will come from outside. But we also work very hard to make sure that the pay and the conditions under which, frankly, all Albertans work are equitable to all.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Sandhu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the same minister. I get questions from many people saying that they are frustrated with the job market, where employers tell them that they don't have Canadian work experience and qualifications. To the minister: what's your ministry doing to help skilled, educated newcomers get their qualifications and experience recognized?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** That's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. In conjunction with various governing bodies like colleges and institutes that govern professions, we work on foreign credentials recognition to make sure that every immigrant works to his or her maximum capacity. At the same time, there is great room for improvement on the federal side to make sure that we inform prospective immigrants whether their credentials will or will not be recognized here in Canada upon their arrival.

**Mr. Sandhu:** My last question is also to the same minister. Does this mean that foreign-trained engineers, doctors, accountants, and other highly skilled professionals can stop working at entry-level jobs unrelated to their professions?

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Mr. Speaker, not necessarily in all cases, but provincial programs are put in place that allow foreign-trained professionals like medical doctors to be assessed and when shortcomings are detected, to avail themselves of additional education to one day meet our Canadian standards. At the end of the day – and I'm sure our minister of health would agree – we have to have a balance of recognizing foreign credentials but, at the same time, not jeopardizing the quality of care that Albertans receive in our hospitals. It's a difficult balance to strike, but at the end of the day, again, we will continue to attract immigrants and make sure that they work to the maximum of their ability.

### Funding for Police Officers

**Mr. MacDonald:** Last week a convicted murderer escaped from the federal prison in Drumheller, stole a vehicle, held two women hostage, then had a shootout with police. The Solicitor General has said that he found this four-day rampage concerning and a reason for pushing the federal government on its crime legislation. To the Solicitor General, please. This incident was not about gaps in the law; it was about getting police out to stop serious crime. Why is this minister passing the buck to the federal government?

**Mr. Oberle:** I'm doing no such thing, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that the inmate was in federal custody and was under escort of a federal agent. It happened in our province. I have expressed my concern that it happened in our province, and I am seeking a comment from the federal minister on how it

happened and how we might be able to avoid such incidents in the future.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that Stats Canada data show that to the end of 2010 Alberta ranked 12th out of 13 provinces and territories for the number of police officers relative to population, why is the Solicitor General looking to federal government laws instead of solving the problem right here on the ground in this province by hiring more police officers?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, I might point out, Mr. Speaker, that the member's statistics are wrong. We've had this debate before; we'll probably have it in estimates again. He should be prepared to explain why our crime statistics are going down under our current police force.

Yet again I would point out to him that it was not a police officer that was escorting this prisoner. The fact that the prisoner escaped has absolutely nothing to do with the number of police that we have in the province.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Stats Canada information is here, for your interest.

Again to the same minister. Being taken hostage in your own home should be more than just concerning. It strikes at the heart of our cherished belief that we should be safe in our own homes. What is the Solicitor General doing to bring policing to a level that will protect Albertans from being taken hostage in their own home?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, that's precisely why that member, Mr. Speaker, wouldn't accomplish anything with his query. The number of police officers in our province has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that a criminal escaped. I am deeply concerned that a criminal escaped. I'm going to take it up with the federal minister, the only avenue I have to solve the problem.

2:40

**The Speaker:** Well, 19 members were recognized today. There were 112 questions and responses.

I would like to point out that there has been some creeping in here of preambles on the second or the third questions. That's pretty noticeable today, and that seems to then give rise to a lot of increased volatility and emotion because it tends to be debate and argumentative. We were doing okay Thursday and yesterday, so let's see if tomorrow we can come back and try it again. Okay? This creeping in is really not that healthy.

In a few seconds from now we'll continue with the Routine. We're making good progress today.

### Notices of Motions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Mr. Anderson:** Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring notice that under Standing Order 30 we'll request leave to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the need for a public inquiry, the urgency of debating whether there is a need for a public inquiry given new revelations that have come . . .

**The Speaker:** I think you had better read into the record your motion. That's the only thing we're talking about.

**Mr. Anderson:** Okay. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that given new evidence from health professionals concerning threats to their careers that follow from public advocacy for patients, in particular the release of a letter by Dr. Lloyd Maybaum containing an explicit threat from his superior in 2008, the government needs to immediately appoint a commission under the Public Inquiries Act to investigate allegations that health care professionals may have been intimidated or faced the loss of employment or professional certification or had their character or mental health questioned unfairly in order to prevent them from speaking out publicly about deficiencies in the delivery of health care and, further, that individuals may have received payments from public health authorities in exchange for their silence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, it's also appropriate that copies be prepared and available for all members of the House. Table officers have advised me they have not been notified that you will be providing the appropriate number of copies, in this case being 90. You'll have to have them here in a couple of minutes from now.

**Mr. Anderson:** Yeah.

### Introduction of Bills

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

#### Bill 16 Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011

**Mrs. McQueen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 16, Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2011.

This bill supports the important work of both the Alberta Utilities Commission, the AUC, and the Energy Resources Conservation Board, the ERCB.

Amendments will update existing legislation to authorize the regulation of extraction of coal through in situ gasification or liquefaction. Further amendments will remove duplication in approval requirements for the use of large amounts of energy for industrial and manufacturing operations and will enable the ERCB to make regulations and to approve amendments to coal permits in line with other industries that the ERCB regulates. Other amendments support the effective functioning of the electricity market in ensuring service quality to utility consumers.

Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 16 and encourage all members to support its passage. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 16 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Sir, can I table on his behalf, please?

**The Speaker:** Proceed.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, and then I'll ask permission to continue and do my own tablings.

The first is referencing tablings we tried to do yesterday, so this is a letter from the United Nurses of Alberta signed by Karen Craik and Jane Sustrik. They are concerned that there was no serious investigation and that the dismissal of a complaint was completed without even interviewing the complainants, and they feel that this is a very serious problem.

The second is in reference to comments that the Leader of the Official Opposition made today, and that is Wait Times in Canada: A Comparison by Province, 2011, from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. This was released in March of 2011, the appropriate number of copies of that.

May I continue with my own tablings?

**The Speaker:** Yes.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two additional tablings. One is a tabling to correct a tabling I did before in which I did not include the e-mail header that showed that this was an e-mail. Again, it is from Naomi Fridhandler, who is a U of A medical student who wrote me with her concerns about the potential loss of funding for the Alberta Medical Association's physician and family support program. This is through the negotiations between the Alberta Medical Association and the government. I will table those documents again.

Finally, my second tabling is notification of a rally here at the Legislative Assembly for Saturday, March 26, at 1 p.m., which is people interested in health asking for a public inquiry now. They can contact Friends of Medicare for additional information.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Government House Leader, when the Premier was speaking today, there were documents to be tabled, as I recall.

**Mr. Hancock:** Yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker. I table on his behalf the appropriate number of copies of a document entitled Time for a Truce in Health-care Debate. It's a digital version of a copy of a letter published in the *Edmonton Journal* on March 22 at page A19 in the letters section, final edition, from Dr. Ameeta Singh, and it includes the quote that the Premier referenced.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, as I recall, you quoted from a letter. Kindly table it.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I provide the requisite number of copies. In question period this afternoon, as was indicated earlier, with the minister of health an exchange took place, and the quotation was where Dr. Maybaum said that he was told to keep quiet and that there were people high up in the government who want his head on a platter. I submit them today.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four sets of tablings today concerning the Castle, the first of which includes the authors and articles I referenced in my member's statement as well as a more recently published article by Trevor Howell and one by Susan Quinlan of the *Prairie Post* entitled Parks Legislation under Revision, Drawing Concern.

My second set of tablings is an e-mail from Juergen Boden of Oststeinbek, Germany, who is seeking the preservation of the Castle wilderness by stating:

We here at Alouette Verlag – Book and Film Productions – are in strict opposition of your plans to undertake block-cut logging in this unique wilderness place as it is of irreplaceable spiritual, ecological and recreational value for all Canadians and for all visitors from abroad.

My third set, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the following individuals who share Mr. Boden's concerns regarding the Alberta government's exploitation of the Castle. The individuals include Taylor Will, Shawna Edworthy, Leslie Stastook, Sue Sargent, Jenny Ferguson, Alexandra Shriner, Jessica Eustace, Mark Matheson, Nyk Danu, Erica Heuer, Shizu Futa, Chelsea Vignola, Robyn Duncan, Linda Rae, Peter Herrmann, Dana Rothkop, Dr. Emma Griffiths, Sanne van der Ros, Chelsea Boida, Dana Armitage, Laura Dupont, Betty McInnes, Melissa Lawrence, Anita Romaniuk, and Phillip Sorbetti.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, my last set involves Jeremy Kurtz, Debra Yendall, Robert Klei, John Postma, Cecilie Davidson, Harold Funk, David Feeny, Sheila Winder, Paul Falvo, Emma Pike, Mark Essiembre, Jennifer Groot, Sue Maxwell, Sarah Fletcher, Lesley Willows, Carol Zhong, Susan Bull, Mary Gorecki, Bob Stuart, Margaret Kennedy, Dianne Olmstead, Rita MacDonald, Senan Griffin, Walter Mirosh, and Marjorie Larson, all concerned about the Castle.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies and would like to table a program. Immigrant Services Calgary had a wonderful gala, called the immigrants of distinction awards, on the 19th of March, 2011, down in Calgary. I had the honour of attending. The contribution and the recognition of the various immigrants that have come to Alberta recently – and some of them have even been here for quite some time. The contribution that they've made: it's just incredible. I think that the Members of the Legislative Assembly would find it quite intriguing to read.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Employment and Immigration.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of tablings. Earlier during questions to me there was a reference to a report, Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market, on the gap between salaries of Caucasian and non-Caucasian immigrants to Canada. I'd like to table copies of that particular report.

Also, a copy of a letter that I issued to the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo in response to his letter, as he tabled, outlining the wide scope of services that our office in Fort McMurray has been and continues to offer not only to all residents in Fort McMurray but particularly to those affected in the condo and also inviting him to stop over in Fort McMurray one day to visit our staff and perhaps express his gratitude for the same.

### Request for Emergency Debate

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, please proceed with your Standing Order 30 application, with brief arguments in favour of urgency.

### Patient Advocacy by Health Professionals

**Mr. Anderson:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my first Standing Order 30, so please bear with me. I will try to do my best.

Standing Order 30(1), of course, states:

After the daily routine and before the Orders of the Day, any Member may request leave to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance when written notice has been given to the Speaker at least 2 hours prior to the sitting of the Assembly.

As I understand it, the question here is: is this matter that we are bringing forward here of urgent public importance? Is there public importance, and is it urgent? Or can we discuss this at other times and places in the Legislature during session here?

The reason that we in the Wildrose feel that it is of urgent public importance is – I don't think the public importance part is in dispute. I think, obviously, we're talking about health care. We're talking about a crisis of confidence in the system, with all these different doctors and individuals coming forward and saying that they've been intimidated into not advocating for their patients. That's well documented. I do think that it is important, and we see this with the government's own actions by calling for an Alberta Health Quality Council review. So I don't think public importance is too much of the issue here.

What I do think is the issue and what there may be a debate over is the urgency, especially given that we did have a debate on a different motion, put forth by the Liberal caucus last week, last Monday actually. We also had submitted a notice of Standing Order 30 at that time, too, but you can only debate one in a day. So we debated for about an hour and a half the issue that the Liberals brought forward, and it was a good debate.

Now, aside from the fact that we don't think there was enough time during that debate – but that's not at issue here – the problem is that since that debate took place last Monday, there has been literally an avalanche of new information, new revelation that has come forward that was not known at the time that we had the debate.

For example, last Monday the only thing that we had, really, was the allegations by Dr. McNamee in a somewhat older statement of claim that he had been essentially bullied, intimidated, essentially let go for advocating on behalf of his patients. We had that document. There were some other doctors who were off the record saying a few things, which are very serious allegations, but there was nothing, really, other than that. There wasn't all that much besides that. We also had, of course, at that time, obviously, what happened with the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark last fall as well as what happened to the Leader of the Opposition while he was in Medicine Hat.

We had these kinds of past issues that were dealt with and that we discussed in that emergency debate on Monday, but since then, I would submit, the evidence has compounded greatly, to the point where we have, of course, as has been tabled earlier in this House, the AMA, the Alberta Medical Association, coming forward with two letters. The first, given a few days ago, on the 14th, said that for the first time ever the government had resorted to intimidation tactics to get the AMA to agree to the government agreement.

There was a letter a couple of days later, also from the AMA, that's also been tabled in this Legislature, that specifically noted that there needs to be a clearing of the air and that they fully supported a public inquiry and would co-operate should one be called. That's the AMA, representing doctors and our physicians as a whole. It is, obviously, very problematic if you have, essentially, the body that represents the physicians in Alberta saying that there needs to be a clearing of the air publicly. If we do not clear the air, if we refuse at this point to have a full public inquiry, I think that I could say that the people that we're talking to, the people that I know other opposition parties are talking to, would feel that there is truly a crisis of confidence in the health care system, not just by

the public but by the very doctors that work in the system. How can we go forward in that way? That is one of the major things that has changed since last week.

The other thing that I think has created some urgency, Mr. Speaker, between last Monday's debate and where we sit today, eight days later, is the letter, the smoking gun, brought forward by Dr. Lloyd Maybaum. The letter – and that's been tabled in this Legislature as well – clearly threatens his position within Alberta Health Services. It was written by a member of Alberta Health Services who is now a very senior AHS official in the area of mental health and addictions. To have that person still at AHS after writing this letter – now, we don't know who directed that individual to write that letter. We don't have a clue about that.

The thing is, Mr. Speaker, that unless we have a debate today and determine whether or not – we'd have to understand how we're going to get to that information, or else we'll never know, and these intimidation tactics will continue. Clearly, we have to debate whether the Alberta Health Quality Council is the right forum to get at that information or if a full independent public inquiry, with powers of subpoena and the ability to compel evidence, et cetera, is the right vehicle to go forward on this. I won't make arguments on that because that's not what we're debating right here, but we absolutely have to have that debate as we move forward.

3:00

The other major and, I think, frankly, scary thing that has come up since last week is, again, the same Dr. Maybaum, who quotes a senior health official in Calgary telling him that there are people high up in the government – it doesn't even say health officials; it just says high up in the government – who want his head on a platter. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo just tabled that document a few minutes ago. That's a very threatening and menacing tone. It is very recent. This is around 2008, so it involves the sitting government. It happened during the time that the current administration was elected. It is very important that we get to the bottom of this.

Again, we did not have any of this information prior to last week. Of course, there are others since last week, and I'm only going to go there because . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, please. I have now given you the liberty of eight minutes to briefly state your case about the urgency. If, in fact, Standing Order 30 was upheld, you would have a maximum of 10 minutes to speak. On the argument for urgency you have spent eight. Is there additional information you have to provide to deal with the question of urgency?

**Mr. Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will wrap up, then. Very quickly, on the issue of urgency there are many doctors that are coming forward not only to us but to other opposition parties as well as having been quoted in numerous reports, saying that they cannot and will not come forward unless there is a full public inquiry. My fear is that if we don't have this debate today and if we don't settle this issue and give them a forum in which they can come forward, we will lose the opportunity that we have right now, right this second, where doctors are finally willing to come forward and talk about this on the record.

If we don't do this today, if we continue to delay, I fear that the intimidation tactics will continue. These doctors, in order to save their careers and to be able to get the operating time that they need, et cetera, will slide back into the shadows and will forever not testify before a full public inquiry. So those are my arguments on urgency, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Can I have some idea as to how many individuals would like to participate in this? The standing orders are very clear:

The Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave and the Speaker may allow such debate as he or she considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

So can I get some idea of how many want to participate? No. Sorry. I'll accept two speakers: the Government House Leader and the Opposition House Leader. Briefly, please, on urgency.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was tempted to intervene earlier, but I just got the notice of motion, actually, quite late in the process, which in itself is a departure from the normal process.

Under Standing Order 30(7)(d) "the motion must not revive discussion on a matter that has been discussed in the same session pursuant to this Standing Order." Very clearly, this is on exactly the same topic. In fact, the hon. member in his comments referenced the fact that we had this debate one week earlier, but he didn't have as much information to say at that time. He wants another opportunity on the same discussion so that he can bring forward more information. He might have more information, but it is the same discussion, and it's out of order to have a Standing Order 30 motion that revives discussion on a matter that has been discussed in the same session pursuant to this standing order.

The Speaker will recall that on March 14 – and it's referenced in *Hansard* issue 12, page 328 – the motion was that new evidence has surfaced, almost the same language, "demonstrating that the government silenced critics of the health care system, thereby contributing to the crisis in Alberta's health care." It's exactly the same language as the hon. member used in supporting the need for another opportunity for him to discuss and for this House to discuss exactly the same issue that was debated on March 14.

Mr. Speaker, the motion is out of order under our standing orders. It's clearly out of order under our standing orders.

The hon. member, as you pointed out, in his rather lengthy short process to suggest urgency goes on to misquote some of the letters that have been tabled in the House – they've been tabled in the House, and they've now been available for people to read for a week; he still can't read them – saying that the AMA in their second letter fully supported a public inquiry. Well, they didn't. It's clear on the surface of it.

The short of it is, Mr. Speaker, that there is a public investigation happening through the Health Quality Council. There is an opportunity for all of the information to come forward to the Health Quality Council. The terms of reference of the Health Quality Council inquiry have been made public. The opportunity is there for any person who's an employee of Alberta Health Services or who otherwise operates in the health system to go before the Health Quality Council. An interim report will be made public in three months, a subsequent report in six months, and a final report in nine months. There will be opportunity to discern this once the information is actually known rather than the allegations that are being brought forward. There's plenty of time to deal with this issue if there is an issue.

The short of it is that we had an emergency debate on this a week ago, and it's not in order to have another one today.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, there was a debate a week ago. That's clearly on the record. But equally on the record through tablings and other means of raising the issue

is that there have been quite a stack, a litany of new things to consider along with this issue.

I just want to address what appears in 387, where it's asking that there should be no other reasonable opportunity for debate on this particular issue. That contributes to the urgency of having the debate now in that we have had no bill debate come before us in which we could have done this. There's been no government motion in which we could have discussed it although we did manage to have a government motion to discuss interfering in another level of government, so clearly there was time to do that.

But there was no government motion to discuss a public inquiry in health care. There was no private member's bill or motion on the Order Paper. The appropriation bill was for interim supply and was limited in the amount of debate that was allocated for that in that the government had the power to and did in fact call adjournment to the speakers and then brought it back for a vote later. There were not written questions or motions for returns on this issue, and it would take us three weeks to get one through the process in order to have it up. So it's impossible for us to do that now.

A number of questions were raised in question period, but I am very mindful of the number of times the Speaker has reminded us that question period is not to provoke debate and that, therefore, that is an inappropriate place to discuss the complexity of the issue before us.

Having just raised the context of, "Where else could we have discussed this?" there is a debate coming on the ministry of health, but, Mr. Speaker, that is not for some three weeks, almost four weeks from now. Given the speed at which things have changed on this issue, I would have to say that three weeks away is far too long to wait in order to be able to have a serious conversation about the additional allegations that have been brought forward and personal commentary and testimonials that have come forward in the last seven days. Clearly, the urgency of the issue is mounting.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Thank you very much, hon. member, for the brevity with which you addressed this matter. That's very much appreciated.

I say that, hon. members, because there is a Routine this afternoon. The standing orders suggest that should there be an estimate this afternoon, which there will be, a minimum of three hours must be addressed to that estimate. So if it takes me five minutes now to deal with this, then presumably your estimate will start at 3:15 and it would not curtail itself until at least 6:15, which would then set that the next segment tonight, which has to be 30 minutes thereafter, would not be able to commence until at least 6:45, which means that you would be here till at least 9:45. Time is important, and I value your attendance in the House.

3:10

I am prepared to rule on whether the request for leave on this motion to proceed is in order under Standing Order 30(2). The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere did meet the requirements of providing at least two hours' notice to my office by providing the required words to me at 11:23 this morning, March 22, 2011.

As I've indicated many times before in these interventions, the relevant parliamentary authorities on this subject are pages 689 to 696, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, and *Beauchesne's*, paragraphs 387 to 390.

Hon. members, last Monday, March 14, 2011, this Assembly adjourned the ordinary business to discuss a matter of urgent public importance under Standing Order 30. The motion from last

Monday can be found at *Alberta Hansard* for that day at page 328, and it read as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the new evidence that has surfaced demonstrating that the government silenced critics of the health care system, thereby undermining confidence in public health and contributing to the crisis in Alberta's health care system.

Standing Order 30(7)(d), which has been alluded to, states that one of the applicable conditions for a request under this standing order is that "the motion must not revive discussion on a matter that has been discussed in the same session pursuant to this Standing Order."

I recognize that the Member for Airdrie-Chestermere is trying to cast his request in a different light than the motion by the Member for Edmonton-Centre last week, but in the chair's view it is substantially the same issue and, therefore, out of order.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere as well in his remarks this afternoon basically said that there was need for a decision and a decision made today with respect to the matter, but Standing Order 30(6) clearly states, "An emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly."

The chair refers members who are interested in previous rulings concerning the application of Standing Order 30(7)(d) to *Alberta Hansard* for July 20, 1989, at page 890, and to November 17, 2005, at pages 1718 to 1719.

Furthermore – and I repeat it again – this motion would seem to entail a decision of the Assembly if it was permitted to proceed, which violates Standing Order 30(6). And there are very applicable words in there, the need "to immediately appoint a commission."

Accordingly, the chair does not find the request for leave in order under the Assembly's rules, and the question will not be put.

## Orders of the Day

### Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

**The Chair:** Hon. members, the chair would like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

## Main Estimates 2011-12

### Environment

**The Chair:** Hon. Minister of Environment, please, you have the floor now.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I would like to thank my staff for joining me here this afternoon. I'm looking forward to the next three hours: talking about some of the great things that are under way in Environment, clarifying some comments and questions that the members of the House might have, and hopefully cajoling all the members of this committee into recommending the support of my budget when the appropriate time comes.

Just before we get into some brief introductory comments, I would like to take a moment to introduce all the folks that have joined me here this afternoon. To my immediate right is Mr. Jim Ellis, deputy minister. Next to him is Mr. Bob Barraclough, assistant deputy minister of monitoring and science. Bob is the newest ADM, that was appointed to take on our newly created division of

monitoring and science. Next to him is Mike Dalrymple, senior financial officer. Next to Mike is Ernie Hui, assistant deputy minister of policy. To my left is Ms Bev Yee, assistant deputy minister for strategy; Mr. Rick Brown, assistant deputy minister responsible for operations; and finally, Mr. Al Sanderson, who's the assistant deputy minister responsible for corporate services.

Also joining us in the members' gallery: Mr. Jeff Kasbrick, my executive assistant; Mr. Josh McGregor, special assistant to the minister for my office; Erin Carrier, acting director of communications; Martin Krezalek, executive director to the deputy minister; and Shelly Little, section head, financial planning and reporting.

Mr. Chairman, I want to just briefly begin things by expressing my confidence that we continue to operate effectively within the allocated budget, maintaining our commitment to protecting the environment that Albertans hold so very dear. Committee members may notice that Environment's overall budget has decreased to \$290 million this year, compared to last year's \$308 million. I do want to take a few moments to talk about how that came about, and then we can get into it in a little bit more detail a little bit later.

I also want to point out, you may have noticed, that we have reorganized the department. In previous years I expressed frustration that I didn't think that the department was organized to the point where it made strategic sense, and that has been rectified. The budget has been rejigged as best as possible so that we can have true comparables from one year to the next. So where people have been moved around, we took the dollars with them. I think that you will find that for the most part the comparables make sense, and we can deal with those questions throughout. The 2011 budget has been updated to reflect that structure. The new organizational design streamlines our operations and will ultimately improve environmental management across the province.

I also want to point out that water for life no longer has its own line item within the budget. It's included among a number of divisional budgets, but I can assure all members that we remain committed to the strategy, which includes implementing a provincial wetlands policy.

Our priority areas for the 2011 budget: \$121 million for climate change, that includes \$68 million for the climate change and emissions management fund – that is what we expect to collect this year – and \$51 million for projects under the Canada ecotrust for clean air and climate change fund. We have \$97 million for ongoing environmental operations programs – that includes compliance, enforcement, regulatory work, and approvals – and \$22 million of nonvoted operating amortization of the water infrastructure throughout the province of Alberta. There is \$17 million for monitoring, science, and reporting. That's a 21 per cent increase over last year. It will support the development of a world-class environmental monitoring system that is now being developed by an independent monitoring panel, that will be providing their recommendations in June of this year.

3:20

The budget also includes \$18.9 million for water for life. As I mentioned earlier, it is divided out among a number of different divisions within the budget. Cross ministry there is about \$25 million in the government of Alberta budget that can be directly attributed to water for life.

We also have \$190 million in Alberta's capital plan to support drinking water and waste water. That is not in my budget – that is in the Transportation budget – but it's a significant part of what we do in Alberta Environment.

I mentioned that we have an overall decrease in our budget this year, \$10 million less than last year. Nine and a half million for that is the Bassano dam settlement. So the budget-to-budget drop is actually \$18 million. Our budget is \$18 million less than it was last year because we had an increase for the Bassano dam settlement that was added into the budget. The reason for that is quite simple: less money was paid than forecast into the climate change and emissions management funds. That's good news. That means that more facilities are improving their operations or purchasing offsets under our CO<sub>2</sub> management program.

We also include in this budget \$1.1 million for the Bassano dam for access payment and \$9.5 million for discontinuance of claims and litigation by Siksika in the first annual access payment. I need to point out that the Bassano dam is really a crucial piece of Alberta's water management infrastructure. This settlement involves the Alberta government, the federal government, as well as the Eastern irrigation district. It secures water supply for many Albertans and secures the historical wrong that goes all the way back to 1910, when land was taken from the Siksika First Nation for the construction of the dam. All payments are not yet paid and are awaiting federal approval, but we're confident that that will take place.

Our budget protects our core programs, takes action on strategic priorities, and shows that we are being fiscally responsible with Albertans' tax dollars.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'm more than happy to take questions. I understand it's the practice of this committee that the first period of time is allocated to the Official Opposition. I would be more than willing to engage in a to-and-fro if that's the wish, but I leave that up to the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**The Chair:** The next hour is allocated to the Official Opposition, and like the minister said, there will be a dialogue between you two. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to express my appreciation to the staff members from the Department of Environment that have joined us on the floor and have joined us in the gallery. I know that sometimes this is regarded as not your favourite day. Nonetheless, I understand how hard you work and how dedicated you are to environmental stewardship in this province, and I do appreciate it.

I'd also like to express my appreciation to Avril McCalla, who's joining me on the floor today. She is responsible for approximately half of the portfolio research that we are currently doing in the Official Opposition, so I'm very grateful to have her on the floor with me today, seeing as she has about 11 other ministries to be looking after at exactly the same time.

Cutting right to the chase, as you all know I like to do: tough year for credibility around the government and protection of the environment. What I want to do today is ask a few questions. I'm more than willing, by the way, Mr. Chair, to engage in a back and forth for the 60 minutes' time that we have. What I'd like to do is ask a few general questions about the budget and then talk about monitoring, tailings ponds management and reclamation, water, emergency response, climate change and the climate change emissions management program, alternative energy, including energy conservation and energy efficiency, cumulative effects management. Then I've got some odds and sods if we get there, and if we don't, I'll just pass the list on to you.

Let me try going through that first list of questions. I'm referencing page 142 of the estimates. As we look back and forward at a tendency here, between 2008-09 and this year of '11-12 we saw a fairly significant increase in the total budget for Environment

and then a kind of slower but steady decline. I'm wondering, given how important the environment is and our good name internationally, why there hasn't been better support – and this might be a difficult for the minister to answer – for a plateauing of his budget rather than a decrease of his budget given the recession that we were in.

The second question in that series. There was a forecast last year of it looks to us like \$227.8 million, but the actual amount was quite a bit less, at \$199.7 million. So what money didn't get spent last year, and did that stay the same this year? Did it get replenished, or did it stay at the same of whatever got cut out of the previous year? I'm a little concerned that stuff has been cut quite a bit, and then it's going to stay at that level. That's part of the trouble that we're experiencing in health care right now, so I don't want to see the same trend.

There's also a great deal of fluctuation between the actuals and the budgeted amounts over the last couple of years. I'm wondering: is there a particular reason why this budget is fluctuating consistently over the years?

Now, I've just got one more question in that series. Under section 2 of the estimates, under Policy, the \$74.8 million: how exactly is this policy money spent? What do Albertans get for it? How exactly is it broken down? I mean, clearly, we can see some general categories there, but I have no idea what programs are included in that or aren't included in that.

I will let the minister just answer some of those questions very quickly.

**Mr. Renner:** Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin with some general comments. The member pointed out that our budget has climbed and appears to have dropped. I tried to explain that in my opening comments; I don't think I did a very good job. I want to point out that the reason why there are changes in our budget is because of the magnitude of some of the one-time charges that come into our budget.

I talked about the ecotrust fund. This was an injection of dollars that were federal dollars that basically passed through our budget. We are over time allocating and expending those dollars, and as we run out of that fund, those dollars are no longer reflected in our budget. Those dollars are not used to pay for costs of operating Alberta Environment's budget. We made very, very clear to our staff that we didn't want to compromise our ability to do the work of the department by taking some of these one-time federal dollars and becoming dependent upon them within the department. That would be the reason why it would appear that the dollars are going less, because the amount of funding that's coming out of there is less.

3:30

The other reason, as I explained, was that this year the estimate for the emissions management fund is about \$10 million less than it was last year. That, too, is a flow-through fund. Dollars come in; dollars go out. We are estimating that the amount that we collect will be less because we're seeing higher than anticipated take-up on some of our programs that were developed here in Alberta for offset credits. So rather than paying the \$15 a tonne into our compliance fund, some of the designated emitters are finding opportunities to buy offsets. It's good news. They're Alberta-based offsets. That was the reason why we put the program in there in the first place. But those dollars, then, don't end up coming through our budget.

Then, finally, I did explain that last year we had included some of the settlement costs for the Bassano dam. They actually went through in supplemental estimates; we just dealt with them a while

ago. But they have to be reflected in the reporting for last year. When we report what we expect the forecast is going to be, we include those dollars because we expect that they will be expended in last year's budget. Those were, again, one time. They do not affect our ability to continue to operate the department for our operations side.

The member also talked specifically about the policy side of our department. There are, as you can see outlined on lines 2.1 through to 2.5, five different areas where these dollars are allocated.

Air, land, and waste policy is geared primarily toward policy development, so the kind of things we do there is to provide leadership and policy advice for the development of the air quality management system. That's something that we've been doing on a national basis. Alberta has been taking the lead in developing the air quality management system. We collaborate with the federal government and the provinces to implement that program. It supports the development of air plans that feed into the land-use framework. So although we are not the ministry responsible for Alberta land stewardship, we will be responsible for providing the scientific input for the development of air and water limits and triggers along the way. It supports the development and implementation of the greening government strategy, continues to implement our Too Good To Waste strategy. I won't go on because I've got a lot here.

The other, 2.2, is climate change. Under climate change there is the technology fund, the emissions management fund. The flow-through amount is included in that climate change. It also includes our conservation energy efficiency programs that are reflected in there. The other main one, I think, would be that it also includes Ecotrust, that I talked about a little bit earlier. Again, that's fairly reflective of the discussion that we've been having.

Item 2.3 is clean energy. That's to address the cumulative effects on the oil sands region by developing strategies, management frameworks, and policies to support the lower Athabasca regional plan.

Policy innovation: the work that is currently under way to support Alberta Energy in establishing a single regulator and a systematic common risk and management approach.

Finally, the water policy is for reviewing and renewing the water policy framework for the upstream oil and gas sector in support of enhancing Alberta's regulatory system and preparing our water management policy and systems for water events such floods, droughts, and shortages, including responsive water allocation systems.

So a number of the programs that we've had discussion on that are involving the actual development or application of policy would be included in this division.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much to the minister for those answers, then. I do hear him, that essentially he's saying that there hasn't been a drop in the money that's allocated to the Department of Environment although it looks like it. You've got the Ecotrust money. It's been sitting in that account. It is essentially being drawn down, so every year there is less in it, and therefore your bottom line has less on it. Also, you had those two settlements which would also affect your bottom line, and the emissions management fund, where less is collected.

Now, a couple of quick questions out of that, too. When you say offsets, I'm hearing cap and trade in my head. Is it the same language, or is there a different thing going on here? I'm pretty sure it's the same thing.

The second thing is my observation that \$74 million is a lot of money for policy development. I realize he was kind of skipping

through his lists, so I would ask if you can provide the list of exactly what gets broken out under each of those votes. He was giving me a kind of quick list, but I would appreciate the thorough list if it can be provided to me through whoever is supposed to get it, and then it comes to me. I guess you table it. I would appreciate that. That's the sort of cleanup from the last one.

Now I'm going to go on. The next is the focus on the oil sands and water monitoring. We've had a lot of panels. We had the Schindler report, which the government initially started to discredit Dr. Schindler about and then quickly met with him to compare science. I think that was the language that was being used. From that, we had the provincial panel, the Water Monitoring Data Review Committee. That was provincial panel 1, and it reported.

Provincial panel 2 was a second panel to determine a new monitoring system in the oil sands, and that's the one that I was talking about in question period today. I don't remember the name of that one. It's the water monitoring something. A Foundation for the Future, Building an Environmental Monitoring System for the Oil Sands: oh, no, that's the federal one. Sorry. This is why this just gets so confusing. So there's the monitoring one that's reporting, from which you've lost two members. That's provincial panel 2. You've got federal panel 1, which was the one set up by the former federal minister, Jim Prentice. It found that essentially there wasn't a clear, equitable measure-to-measure monitoring system in the region.

Then we had wild card panel 1, which is the Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel: Environmental and Health Impacts of Canada's Oil Sands Industry, which had more or less the same sort of response, that current evidence was insufficient, regulatory capacity is weak, Alberta faces major potential liabilities as a result of weak financial security practices, that there are valid concerns with RAMP, the regional aquatics monitoring program, and that the environmental impact assessment process is deficient. They have a long quote in here. They've

identified deficiencies in environmental assessment practices compared with international best practice guidance from guidelines promoted by Canadian agencies, international agencies, and industrial associations.

There's a whole list of them there.

Notably, there has generally been inadequate overall risk assessment for technological and natural disasters, assessment of community health impacts (negative and positive), integrated and cumulative ecological impact assessment, and assessment of regional socio-economic impacts.

Then we had provincial panel 3, which was the original aquatics monitoring system, which reported this past January, eight weeks ago or so. So three different panels.

Now I'm going to look under the estimates on page 142 but also the ministry business plans on pages 57 and 58. I think I also reference page 42 of the fiscal plan. This is the one where \$17 million was provided in this year, which is an increase of \$3 million over the previous year, or the 21 per cent that the minister mentioned. It sounds grander when the minister says it because he says 21 per cent and not so grand when I say it because I say \$3 million. This recently appointed Environmental Monitoring Panel will provide the recommendations by June. I'm taking it that this is this water monitoring one.

3:40

My question is: why isn't one of the priority initiatives that's listed in the ministry business plan for 2011-14 to develop and implement a science-based monitoring system for the Alberta oil sands? I expected to see that as part of the language that is being put forward, and I expected to see it to back up the ministry's shift in messaging around monitoring. The closest thing that I see is priority initiative 1.2 in the business plan, which is: "contribute to

building an integrated information, monitoring, reporting and knowledge system." It's not quite what I expected.

The performance measurement, on the other hand, which appears on page 58, reads: "Water quality" – oh, yeah; this is the one I want to know about – "of six major Alberta rivers at key sites, based on monthly data on four groups of variables . . . which are averaged to provide an overall water quality rating." It is suggested that the last actual, which was for '08-09, saw good to excellent water quality in 6 out of 6 river systems.

My questions. What six rivers are tracked under this performance measurement? Two, how is the water tested? In other words, what is it tested for, and how is it done? Three, I'm interested, if one of the rivers is the Athabasca, in how the results that were being produced from that – I'm going to push on how that could be trusted given that we have heard over and over again in the last couple of months that the information that was being produced by the government panels did not account for certain things that are being accounted for elsewhere.

I'm going to stop talking and let the minister answer those questions for me.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by having a brief discussion over the remarks made by the member that suggest that I was attempting to discredit Dr. Schindler and his report. I don't agree with that observation. What I did point out was that there is a disagreement on the interpretation of facts and that I had indicated that our reporting and our monitoring were indicating that we were maintaining a good quality of water in the river, and that really leads into the final remarks.

That's why I asked a panel to have a look at the work, the ongoing science, based on Alberta Environment and our historical data and the science that Drs. Kelly and Schindler did. The conclusion that that panel came to was that, in fact, there is good science in both camps but that the science . . . [A timer sounded]

**The Chair:** It is indicating the first 20 minutes, so continue on, Minister.

**Mr. Renner:** . . . was designed perhaps to do different things. They said that the work that Dr. Schindler did indicated that there could be a deposition from snow, which would be airborne deposition, but there were a number of assumptions that had been made to draw the conclusion that the samples that they found in very isolated and small numbers of samples of snow would then equate to a significant impact on the river. They said that they didn't necessarily agree that that conclusion could be made.

They also reaffirmed even what Dr. Schindler had shown, that if there are these airborne depositions that are ending up in the river, they're in very small quantities, so small that the monitoring that goes on does not measure them. That's how we get into this dichotomy where you have, on one hand, someone saying that we have good quality and, on the other hand, someone saying: well, we have evidence to indicate that there is something to be concerned about. That's the reason we are now in the process of reviewing our monitoring system, so that we can understand whether or not at some point in time these very small deposits could be entering our water system or perhaps are entering our water system and, if so, what we need to do. What are the kinds of actions that we would take from a management perspective to deal with it?

The panel also pointed out that it's important that we not only identify and quantify the quality of water but that we have more emphasis in the monitoring and science on determining whether or not that is causing adverse effect on the environment, particularly from an overall biodiversity perspective. That's why we are de-

veloping a program right now that is designed to incorporate all the various media: land, water, and air as well as biodiversity. At the end of the day, really, it's the health and relative well-being from a biodiversity perspective that tells us whether or not we are adequately protecting the environment and we have appropriate mechanisms in place.

The member asked which rivers we monitor. The rivers: the North Saskatchewan, South Saskatchewan, Athabasca, Bow, and Old Man. As I indicated, the testing that we have been doing has indicated from all independent kinds of standards that are set for water that our rivers are in that good to excellent category. That is true, but I think there's probably a good chance that when the numbers come out for next year, we will find, particularly in the South Saskatchewan, where we saw a flooding event take place last year, that the turbidity in that river will probably be enhanced. So we may not be able to say next year 6 out of 6. We may find that it maybe will drop to 5 out of 6 because of the amount of sediment that's washed down with these flood events and that the turbidity, then, will take some time to settle down in the river basin. So that's the nature of this performance measure.

Let me say that as we move towards cumulative effects and as we start to put in place much more rigid triggers and limits into the water management system through our Alberta land stewardship – and we'll soon see the numbers that have been arrived at for the lower Athabasca region – these kinds of performance measures will in all likelihood change. They'll become much more specific as to whether or not we are meeting the expectations and we are appropriately taking action as various triggers are reached or approached. I would think that the performance measures, particularly in my department, will become much more meaningful in the future than perhaps they've been in the past.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Thank you. I missed one of the rivers, but I'll pick it up from the *Hansard*.

I'm going to stay on the monitoring for a bit longer. The new monitoring system: I'm wondering if it is going to be government run or if the minister is going to put it under RAMP to continue to lead water monitoring in the oil sands area? I would argue that that's a discredited agency now and not a good place to put it, but I'm interested in what's happening with that. The minister may well say: "Well, I'll do whatever the panel that's developing this monitoring is going to tell me," in which case he's got two answers to give me. One, if they tell him it should be government run and, two, if they tell him that it should be under RAMP, is he going to listen to that?

3:50

I'm also interested in what the funding structure would look like. The minister has said a number of times that he expects that it will be industry funded. Now, I see \$17 million in the budget for monitoring, science, and reporting. So is that the idea, that that amount of money is not including money to actually put this new monitoring system in place? I'm interested in what is under line 5, monitoring, science, and reporting. It's a single line. If I could get the breakdown of exactly what that does fund, and if it's a long list, I'm perfectly happy to get it in writing.

On page 42 of the fiscal plan it looks as though this water panel is going to cost \$3 million. That's what it seems to say. I'm quoting here from the section Environmental Monitoring, Science and Reporting.

About \$17 million is provided in 2011-12, an increase of \$3 million or over 21% . . . The recently appointed environmental monitoring panel will provide recommendations to government by June 2011 on the development.

It looks to me as though this panel is going to cost \$3 million, so I'm just looking for confirmation about that. I'm wondering if the costs that are associated with the monitoring panel that was appointed by the minister are included under monitoring, science, and reporting. If not, where is it? It's not being pulled out here, and I'm wondering exactly where it is.

I'm just going to move on now and talk about the health impact study in Fort Chipewyan, in which there was a sort of trifecta of ministries involved: Health, Aboriginal Relations, and Environment. I know that the process is currently stalled because the ministers are waiting for certain things that the First Nations – well, it's back and forth. The First Nations believe certain things are essential, and the ministry involved is waiting to go ahead, and they can't provide certain things. So the ball is bouncing back and forth.

I'm wondering: what is the role that this ministry has played to date in the initiation and follow-through of this health study in Fort Chip? If it goes ahead, will the Minister of Environment have any role, or has the ministry committed any funding? If so, again, where would I find it under the budget lines that appear on page 142? Does the ministry have a commitment to table the results of this health study or, at a minimum, their piece of the results of that health study?

I'll let the minister answer those questions.

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Chairman, the breakdown for line 5: I have a page here, and I'll be happy to forward it to the member if she likes, and we won't waste a lot of time.

I want to get to the crux of the discussion, and that is: is this new monitoring panel going to be coming back with recommendations, and when they do, how am I going to be dealing with them? I think that one of the things that I discussed with the panel when I met with them in providing them with a little bit of advice over and above the terms of reference that they already have was to point out to them that at the end of the day we have to have a system that is science based, that will stand the scrutiny of peer review, and that is seen to be credible. I've also pointed out that, whether it's true or not, one of the criticisms of RAMP is that it is too much under the thumb of industry. I won't begin to presume what the recommendation is going to be, but I would suggest that it's pretty clear that we've recognized that if the monitoring system is seen to be controlled by industry, it will fall short on that credibility criteria.

When you ask me, "Is this going to be a government-run organization?" I say that I don't know. I can't begin to predict what the panel is going to tell me. I suspect that at the end of the day it will be a collaboration of some kind. The federal government has been involved. Environment Canada, as you know, is looking at their role, the role that they can play in monitoring. We have a role to play in monitoring. We do some monitoring and will continue to do some monitoring. Then there is also a role for ongoing monitoring, similar to what RAMP has been doing but probably changed.

The bottom line is that it needs to be co-ordinated. You can't have one organization that is responsible for monitoring air and one organization that's responsible for monitoring water and another organization that's doing biodiversity and those organizations never talking to one another. As Dr. Schindler pointed out, sometimes you need to be looking for things on the air side to find out if there are impacts on the water side, and sometimes you need to be looking for indications on the biodiversity side to find out if there are indications in other areas. The emphasis of what they're doing is on designing a system that is co-ordinated among all the various media.

Like I say, I don't want to put words in the panel's collective mouths, but I'm confident that they're very aware of some of the issues that we have been dealing with up to date and the reason we've asked them to come into force.

The \$3 million increase in this line item is not there simply to reflect the costs of this panel. The direct costs of the panel will be substantially less than that. We anticipate probably in the vicinity of about \$100,000. There is significantly more money in the monitoring budget to beef up some of the monitoring that we as a government do. That may well be part of the implementation of that monitoring report. Again, I can't predict precisely what portion of that \$3 million will be used to offset costs that are driven directly by the monitoring panel.

I almost hesitate to do so, but I do want to point out that if you go back two years, you'll find that we took a million dollars out of this budget. So putting \$3 million in replaces the \$1 million that was pulled out before. That will help us to beef up some of the programs in some areas. We've talked about the fact that in some of our programs we reduced the frequency. I'm not suggesting that everything would be automatically restored to where it was before, but it does give us some additional flexibility in some areas if it's necessary. I think that pretty much reflects the \$3 million.

I want to respond to the questions regarding the community health study that was referenced with respect to Fort Chipewyan. We had committed to the community of Fort Chipewyan that we would engage with them to develop a community-based environmental monitoring program. We were never able to come to any kind of an agreement on the terms of reference, what this monitoring program would look like. I'm extremely disappointed that that was the case. We just never could get the community and ourselves eye to eye on where this is going to go. I would suggest that the work that Environment does will be incorporated into the community health study that is driven by Alberta Health.

So Alberta Health will take the lead. The funding for the program is within Alberta Health, but Environment will provide appropriate support as requested. If there is a need for some environmental monitoring to be incorporated into that community health study, then we would provide the expertise and be on the ground to help them set that up in whatever way that they request us to do it.

4:00

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much. Thank you for the information, and I'll look forward to receiving the list that the minister offered.

I'm going to shift slightly, but not very far, to water. The minister had mentioned that the water for life line item was taken out and that the entire budget was redistributed. Actually, one of the questions that I had is: where is water for life? The minister now tells me, "It's everywhere," so if his support staff could be so kind as to give me a breakdown of where it went. We had an estimate of \$18.9 million that was allocated to water for life. The minister mentioned it, and do you think I can find the notes I took on that now? Oh, here we go. Water for life, \$18.9 million – okay; I was right about the numbers – and a total of \$21 million cross ministry. That \$18.9 million: can you give me the breakdowns of where it turns up in your line items that appear on page 142? That would be very helpful.

I would be very interested in the minister's opinion or in your analysis of what was achieved in reference to water for life and, therefore, what's expected to be achieved in water for life. What are the improvements? What are the tangible differences that have happened in the program? How has water for life improved water management in the province?

I look at page 42 of the fiscal plan, and it talks about water for life. "In addition to \$190 million in capital support, \$25 million in operating support will be provided . . . to continue implementation of Alberta's Water for Life strategy." How will the \$190 million in capital support be used? How is it distributed? What specific projects are being required for the implementation of water for life? How much of this is coming from the Department of Environment? If it's not coming from Environment, then who is supplying it?

Then I want to also talk to the minister and have more of a discussion on what is happening with a new Water Act or the whole question about the water allocations that exist now, the FITFIR system, first in time, first in right, which for anybody listening at home or reading the *Hansard*, which I know everyone does, paying attention to every word, essentially said that the people who got there first have the allocation that is there. That allocation is never 100 per cent of the flow, obviously, but it is a certain allocation. The problem is that we now have a lot more people that need water, but only sort of the first group that got there, that first queue, have the licences for those allocations.

I have always felt that we are under a different time and that we need a different system and that the government should move away from the FITFIR system. I'm picking up, I'm sensing that the minister doesn't agree with me, and I'm sure he will put that on the record. I'm most concerned because in the system he talks about with transferring, money gets involved.

I understand that's the second 20 minutes.

**The Chair:** Hon. member, you have the last 20 minutes. Continue.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. I think we start to tiptoe into some really dangerous territory, and it is a slippery slope. I mean, we can look at what happened in Australia and Chile. As they went to a water market system, essentially, you know, they ended up privatizing their water and then having to buy it back.

There are a couple of good questions that have been brought up to me, and one of them is that what we do with our water affects the rest of the world. If we make certain choices about how we talk about our water or legislate our water, that may well give an opening to other countries to come in and, for example, if they can buy land and get rights to water, allocation to water, transfer of water, they would then be able to do whatever they want with that, and we lose control of it. Then the control goes to another country.

The concept of water being, essentially, a public trust and that the government holds water in trust for the public and is required to protect that is something I would like to see the government move to. My reading of that does not include things like a water market because it moves away from a public trust concept.

Essentially, you want to make sure that everything that's done with water is in the broader public interest and does not make a choice that is primarily in a private interest or primarily benefits a private interest. You know what? We had one of those before us with the Balzac racetrack, which didn't happen in the end, but the shopping mall certainly did. I mean, they were looking for water, and that was a private interest. That's a perfect example of what can happen and did happen here. Now, because of the laws we had in place at the time, they ended up getting their water not from where they thought they would, but they were able to purchase a licence or part of a licence from an irrigation district to carry through with this. But that's the slippery slope that I'm looking out for.

I'd like the minister to talk more about when we're going to see that Water Act. He dances pretty well when I ask that question; he's pretty light on his feet. I think it's important that we have a

much clearer sense of when that's coming, just to be fair. I've been the critic for this portfolio now for – this is my third budget. I've been hearing the same answer around that Water Act: it's soon. Three years is a long time to be soon. When is the Water Act coming? Is he going to go with some kind of transfer of licence or transfer of allocation system; in other words, a water market? Is he going to choose a water market as the delivery system for this as we move forward?

Also, is he planning on taking any kinds of steps inside of a Water Act that would be more conscious of how water gets used? We've made some choices where we've done basin-to-basin water transfers in order to keep a settlement of people going or even to allow them to increase their density. The question that I ask when I look at that is: was it appropriate to allow that to continue? We did. We enabled it to continue by transferring the water. Is that a sensible thing for a government to be allowing or encouraging, legislating to happen given that they are holding water in public trust for everyone else? Things like crops that we decide to grow given irrigation – am I making everybody up there crazy?

I think this is the most important discussion, aside from the monitoring issue, that the minister and I can have because I think these two things are at the bottom of what's really going on around environmental stewardship. There are a number of other ones like reclamation and the oil sands and things, but really if you don't have a clean glass of water or you don't have enough water to grow food in a local area – see, this starts to roll onto a lot of things.

I keep talking about recognizing that most Albertans live in urban settings, but that doesn't mean that I don't care about what's happening outside of those. I care very much, especially when we look at food security. A big issue around security is: can we grow enough food close to home that we're not transporting it, you know, thousands of miles in a truck, which is burning gas and contributing to greenhouse gases? It all starts to come around and go around at a certain point.

I'm going to sit down and let the minister try and answer the specific questions that I gave him and try and give me some more information about when the Water Act is coming, what some of the key things are that he's set in place around that, and then whether he has anticipated trying to actually shape and move our water use as part of that act.

**The Chair:** The hon. minister.

4:10

**Mr. Renner:** Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The member started her comments by talking about water for life and referencing the fact that the water for life line item is no longer in the budget. I can give you the breakdown on where the funds are. There's about a million dollars in ministry support services; \$3 million in clean energy initiatives; \$2 million in the approvals section of the budget; water operations, another \$2 million; monitoring and reporting, \$1 million; water policy, \$8.5 million; relationships and partnerships, \$1 million; and policy innovation, approximately half a million dollars.

I also want to point out that in '09-10 we prepaid grants to the WPACs, watershed planning and advisory councils, which amounts to about 4 and a half million dollars under the water for life program as well.

The significant portion that I referred to – that is, the water for life budget that is not within the ministry's budget but is, instead, in Transportation – is available on Transportation's website. I have a copy of the website here that shows the approvals up to June of 2010. It's Alberta municipal water/waste-water partner-

ship, regular program, stand-alone systems, projects approved up to June 2010. It's available on the website. If you have trouble finding it, I'll certainly have someone provide you with a little bit more detail.

You asked: what are the results of water for life? Well, water for life is an ongoing strategy. It's not complete as of yet, but it is complete to the point where we feel that it has been integrated into the core business of what we do within the department. That's the reason why it finds itself spread throughout the department, because it really governs the way we do business. To continue to have it as a stand-alone line item no longer makes sense because it doesn't reflect what it is that we do.

I think that there are a couple of areas I could point to as being significant accomplishments of water for life. One is the development of these strong partnerships that are there, particularly in the development of WPACs around the province. We just last week announced the development of yet another WPAC for the Peace River. We've got these local, community-based watershed councils now that are operating on virtually every major water basin throughout the province, helping us to make that kind of awareness at the community level and to also help us to develop appropriate policy for protecting water along the way.

We have seen significant adoption of water conservation initiatives. The water for life partnership says that we should be increasing our water conservation initiatives by 30 per cent by 2015. We've seen significant progress in the irrigation districts, in municipal governments, both rural and urban. The AUMA is actively engaged with us, as is AAMD and C. We've also had a significant amount of success on the conservation side within industry, the oil and gas industry in particular.

The discussion around water allocation. The member asked: when are we going to bring in a Water Act? Well, I want to point out that we have a Water Act. We have a Water Act that is widely acknowledged as one of the best pieces of legislation in the world. I'm told – I wasn't here at the time; I was in this House during part of the time, but I certainly wasn't minister – that the Water Act under which we operate now took from about 1991 to 1999, from the time that the discussions originally began until it was fully implemented.

The discussions around legislation as it affects water, as the member has quite rightly pointed out, are very difficult, very emotional, and one needs to tread lightly and make sure that you get it right. That's the process we're in right now. We're saying that we have excellent legislation. That legislation is serving us well, but there are areas where we have to have a look at whether or not it can serve us better or whether changes to that legislation are necessary for it to serve us better.

One of the things that is in the Water Act, that has been there since 1999, is the separation of water licences from land titles. Previously water licences were attached to land. You don't get access to water unless you acquire the land. In 1999, recognizing that the world had changed then, there was a separation of the water licence from the land. There are instances where licences that are attached to land for various reasons are no longer relevant. The use of the land has changed, so that water licence becomes redundant.

We put in place a process whereby licences could be transferred from one holder to another. This is nothing new. This is nothing that has been introduced recently. What has heightened the attention and the focus on licence transfers of late is the fact that the South Saskatchewan River basin has been closed. Once you have a closed basin, you can no longer come to the government and ask for a new water allocation because there is no more water to allocate. Now we're starting to see more frequent use of the

opportunities that are available within the Water Act to transfer licences.

There are many – and I think the member even alluded to those – kinds of speculations that allowing water licences to be transferred somehow creates a commodity for water, commoditizes water, and removes any ability to continue to use water, and I categorically deny that that's the case. It is very, very clear that any licence that is being contemplated for transfer from one user to another has to be able to demonstrate on both sides of the transaction. On the original holder side that holder has to demonstrate how their actions have resulted in reduced need for that water, reduced use of that water. You can't simply transfer surplus water that you've never used. You have to say: we have taken specific action or will take specific action as a result of this transfer and the cash that we have from this transfer to reduce the need for water.

That was the case in the Balzac situation that she talked about. The Western irrigation district said: "We will take money, invest it into our infrastructure. We will replace open irrigation ditches with underground pipes that will reduce the amount of evaporation. We'll beef up our storage capacity so that we better manage the water that's within. At the end of the day we will be able to actually irrigate more acres than we did formerly, using less water." The water that is saved is transferred on the licence transfer.

Conversely, on the other side of the coin, someone who applies to receive one of these licence transfers has to be able to demonstrate that there's reason to believe that they can use that water, that they have a demonstrated use for that water. We cannot and do not allow any transfers to take place for speculative reasons, for example. No one can acquire a licence if they can't demonstrate how they're going to physically receive that water out of a diversion and how they are going to use that water. So the suggestion that somehow someone could acquire a licence and then ship it off, you know, to points unknown is simply not the case.

Now, if someone puts a bottled-water plant together and you have a soft drink manufacturing facility or something, some of that water probably ends up outside of the water basin, but it is of an insignificant amount, and it's done as common practice everywhere, not just in Alberta. But to suggest that someone could actually make wholesale interbasin transfers of water simply because they hold a licence for that water is simply not the case. It is not the case in the Water Act, and it's never been the case in any of the discussion documents that we've been involved in.

4:20

Now, the million-dollar question, or maybe it's more than a million-dollar question: when is all of this going to happen? All of this is going to happen when we have an opportunity for the public (a) to engage in the discussion and (b), more importantly, to engage in a way that allows people to participate in that discussion of water from a knowledge base that allows the discussion to be based on fact and not hyperbole.

I get very frustrated with a lot of the noise that is around the discussion of a water allocation policy, whether it be in the social networks or whether it be in newsletters or other places, where people are suggesting that somehow the government has got this nefarious plan to deny Albertans the access to water that they need. Nothing could be further from the truth. Absolutely nothing. Nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to ensuring that we conserve water for the purpose of maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems. That has to be the underlying premise for any kind of water allocation system that we would move towards.

I can't answer that question. Frankly, I'm disappointed that we have not moved forward yet. Every time we start to get close to

having that discussion, the furor whips up again. People get all excited, and no one has really got their minds focused on having a good, intelligent conversation around what we are going to do to accomplish three things: conserve water for the ecosystem, preserve water for recreational and human use, and at the same time facilitate the transfers from existing users to new users that need to have access to that water because we have a growing economy.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much. I know that my time is almost up. I'm going to ask the pages to deliver a list of extra questions over to the minister. I do want to encourage the minister again to include in amendments to the Water Act, which is the way I should have phrased that – I'm sorry; that is what I'm waiting for – that it be specifically stated that water is owned in trust for each citizen and that citizens would have standing in court if that trust is threatened, for example.

I think that's going to protect us when we start to look at what it tells the rest of the world. If we tell the rest of the world we don't have strong limits on water licensing or markets, then it says that our only tool is regulation of a private interest, which is much weaker than a strong statement about water being subject to a public trust and that the Legislature does not have the power to give up that trust, that the Legislature doesn't have the right to override that because holding that water is in the public trust.

I didn't get anywhere near through most of my questions here, but I appreciate the time that I did get from the minister. Let me just quickly go back and see if there's anything I can pop in in the 30 seconds I've got left here.

Of the \$739 million for environmental projects that's listed on page 20 of the fiscal plan, how much is for carbon capture and storage projects? Another way of wording that is: how much of this has already been committed to CCS through the \$2 billion? I'm trying to sort out how much you've spent, how much you're going to spend, and how much is still sitting there. I'm wondering if the long-term plans for the fund have changed and if the minister expects to see continuing declines in the fund as companies in Alberta improve their practices.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Hon. members, the next 20 minutes are reserved for the third party. To the hon. minister and the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you want to exchange within the 20 minutes?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Sure.

**The Chair:** All right. Go ahead, hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you. It's kind of a lot more comfortable over on this side asking questions this afternoon. To the minister and his staff, I welcome you. It seems to be that there are a few more ADMs there from a few years ago.

I want to say first and foremost that I was actually going through your mandate letter. It's signed by the Premier. I'm not sure actually who did write the letter for the Premier, but I do know this. It talks about the fact that to achieve our goals, our priorities for the coming year remain. I have to ask the minister. It says first – and it's not even actually a sentence – "Resourceful," period, "Responsible," period. Is there a missing word in that objective in your mandate letter given to you last year in February? It's not a full sentence. I found it to be somewhat unusual in your mandate letter.

It talks about ensuring Alberta's resources are developed in an environmentally sustainable way, but it starts with just simply one

word, “Resourceful,” period, and then the word “Responsible.” Can you give me just a brief elaboration in a minute or so on what that means to you the way it’s written? Maybe it was amended, where there actually is another word or two that’s been added to your mandate letter because, quite simply, “Resourceful,” period, “Responsible,” period, is not good English, I guess. If you want to clarify that, I’ll provide the opportunity to allow you to do that now.

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that the reference in the mandate letter probably comes from the government of Alberta’s vision statement, that says that the government of Alberta will work towards staying the course on our long-term goals. Resourceful, responsible means ensuring that energy resources are developed in an environmentally sustainable way.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Just reading it, if you don’t see the entire government global view of what it is, it kind of appears to be, I guess, basically two words that were extracted from part of a sentence. In my view, to the minister, you may want to perhaps add some meaningful words to that because I think it would give a clearer message of what your ultimate goals are as a ministry. Of course, you don’t write the letter. That’s written by the Premier, who appoints the members to Executive Council. I strongly, just friendly, suggest that it could be articulated in a more efficient manner to capture the imagination of Albertans on what is intended. That was my first observation.

On that, I first of all want to compliment this minister for the fact that as I was looking through, starting off with ministry support, a couple of things I observed. First and foremost was on the issue of environment. I think your ministry support demonstrated, just going by memory, that total ministry support is either 500 or 700. The reason I say that: I’m actually making a reference to Sustainable Resource Development because I have a suggestion in the budget debates today that you may find helpful in terms of how we continue to stretch our dollars further.

Ultimately, under ministry support for your ministry I believe the estimates are about \$18.4 million. As I go over to Sustainable Resource Development, which, of course, is another ministry, that you’re not responsible for, I saw the potential for a natural merger because it’s actually, under the ministry support for this ministry, \$34.9 million, almost \$35 million, yet your ministry support is half of that. You’re at \$18.5 million, and Sustainable Resource Development is at \$34.9 million.

I look at the categories: minister’s office, cabinet policy, deputy minister’s office, communications, human resources, corporate. They’re the exact same titles, but your ministry only, in fact, cost \$18.4 million for this proposed budget. SRD is actually proposing \$34 million, almost \$35 million. So my first observation is that you’re getting double the value that the sustainable resources ministry is doing unless the comparison is unfair.

4:30

My first question would be this. Would you be willing to take over the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development? As you know, by way of history and as a former Minister of Environment, clearly, in today’s economic times – and I’ve heard this minister in this Assembly talk about continuing to shuttle funds to the front line for things that go on. Would you be willing to do that with your existing ADMs and your DM, to take over Sustainable Resource Development?

By way of history – history is a great teacher – in actual fact a large portion of Sustainable Resource Development, when it was created as a new ministry, really resulted from the Ministry of Environment.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, I’m hesitant to answer directly the question that the member has posed because I think the member knows very well that it’s a somewhat mischievous question in that it’s not a decision that I would make. That’s a decision that the Premier makes when he or she puts together the composition of his or her cabinet. I guess that given that we have a leadership contest under way, we’ll get a chance to find out this fall what the new leader’s vision will be.

There certainly are some instances where it makes sense for parts of Environment to be included with parts of SRD. When I attend my counterparts’ meetings for the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, there are probably as many different combinations across the country as there are provinces. Some provinces include parks in their Environment ministry. Some provinces include mining in their ministry.

I don’t know that there’s a right or a wrong, but clearly there are advantages and disadvantages to combining various operations within this. I think we do a very good job of dealing with those by having an interdepartmental group that works very closely together, where we have Sustainable Resource Development, Environment, and Energy working very closely together in the areas where there is – I won’t call it duplication because I don’t believe that in most cases it is although we’re working to avoid it when it does happen. We work together and make sure that we do co-ordinate our activities so that one isn’t stepping on the toes of another.

As for the ministry support budget, I won’t presume to speak on behalf of the Minister of SRD. I will point out that a value for dollar – well, I shouldn’t point it out because on that basis I don’t know. We have about 700 employees; they have about 2,000 employees. The corporate support for a department roughly three times the size of ours is likely the main difference in the budget. If you look at line 1.6 in our budget, we have \$15 million in corporate support. I don’t know what SRD’s budget looks like, but I suspect that apart from that, it’s about the same.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Just on that, Mr. Chair, with the fact that your corporate support is \$15 million and theirs is almost \$30 million, I’m trying to understand what is so different. Corporate support is a pretty broad term. I certainly would allow the minister an opportunity to delve into the \$15 million. The question I’ll be asking SRD will be: what’s so different about your corporate support, that costs \$30 million to Alberta taxpayers, versus the only \$15 million that it costs the Ministry of Environment? Now, in many ways that can be a compliment to your ministry and to your officials in what has been going on, but for some reason SRD corporate support is twice that, \$30 million.

**Mr. Renner:** I think that question should be asked of the Minister of SRD. I can’t speak to another minister’s budget.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Well, I’d ask you to speak to the \$15 million. What value do Albertans get for corporate support in a large sum of money, \$15 million, which is actually the largest sum? Where does that \$15 million actually go? Also, keeping in mind the umbrella of shuttling funds to the front, where ultimately is the service providing value to Albertans? I guess it’s an opportunity to provide value to Albertans on that \$15 million.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, I don’t have the line-by-line breakdown, but let me just discuss some of the things that are provided under that corporate support item. We have our human resource/people support services, our communications, financial services, strategic business planning, integrated risk management, project management, performance measurement and evaluation, information

technology systems and support, our freedom of information and protection of privacy work, legal services, accommodations, and records information. So it is really the backbone of the department, providing all of the support services.

An interesting one is FOIP. The member may be aware that Environment has one of if not the largest FOIP areas in government. The reason for that is that when there is a land transaction, not every time but most times, when a piece of land is transferred from one owner to another, one of the searches that is often done is through Environment to determine whether or not there have been any environmental issues associated with that particular piece of land. I'm not so sure that the FOIP process is the appropriate process. In fact, we have been working very hard to find a less administratively burdensome way of doing it. Nevertheless, we have literally thousands of requests that we deal with that tend to be pretty standard requests, not the kind of request that you would normally think would require a freedom of information request, but they do. That's just one of the examples of the things that we do under corporate services.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Certainly, communications, that you make reference to, is \$1.267 million in a separate column. Under corporate is \$15.432 million, and I'd appreciate a breakdown of how that \$15.432 million is actually divvied up in terms of connecting to my original question on the value for Albertans, where that is, because communications is in another ministry.

With that, I move on to a couple of important issues. Sadly, if I reflect back on the past year, if we were to ask how we think the year went when it comes to the environment and the perception of the environment – in this House we deal with perceptions, and I think everyone, all members of this Assembly, including the minister and his staff, agree that we want the best and the strongest environment possible in a sustainable manner. In doing so, I might add that every 30 or 40 years, when governments change or when new leaders come about, new things are done. I'm very proud to say that in 1971 there was a new leader called Premier Lougheed. He, in fact, was the first Premier to decide that we should have a ministry of environment.

Many of the members here may not be aware that Alberta was the first province in all of Canada to have a ministry of environment, ahead of Quebec, ahead of the province of Ontario, and also ahead of the federal government. I think it speaks to the values that Albertans place on their environment, which I think is naturally what a leader would do in terms of capturing that in the form of a ministry. Good for Premier Lougheed during those days.

As we go forward, I think it's a fair comment to say that in the perception of specifically my constituency, Fort McMurray and the oil sands, it hasn't been a good year. It hasn't been a good year, so the question is: how do we earn back the respect and confidence of Albertans and the people in my community, where we say, "It's my backyard"? My three-year-old son plays in that backyard and breathes the air there every day. Oftentimes we talk about how proud we are of smelling the oil sands. We do say that it is an important resource that we've been blessed with, well beyond any of our control, but we've been blessed with it.

To the minister: in terms of the dollars he has been allotted in this past year, going forward, are you optimistic that this can be a better year for the Ministry of Environment and, specifically, a better year for my backyard of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, which I've called home for now almost 35 years?

**4:40**

Certainly, I was pleased to see the minister in Fort McMurray when we had the reclamation of Suncor pond 1, which took al-

most 40 years. Technology is of course helping us now be able to do that 30 years sooner than what took place before. My question is: are you more hopeful that this year the perception by Albertans and around the world is that we can be viewed as even more environmental in terms of caring for the environment in light of everything that's taken place in the last year? The reason I say that, just to conclude, is that there was a sense where the minister somewhat upset me because I thought he threw the oil sand companies under the bus. I actually, if you can believe this, complimented the Minister of Energy, saying that he was the only one who didn't throw the oil sand companies under the bus. It was in a question period.

To the minister: are you hopeful that we can have a better year, the government and the Ministry of Environment, in terms of the perception that is taking place relative to the oil sands, the reclamation that's going on, the monitoring, and what is so important to my backyard and my three-year-old son? Will we have a better year?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Chairman, I can't begin to predict events that might occur throughout the next year that would perhaps affect the focus on oil sands, but I can tell you that for the areas that I do have control over, I am very optimistic that we are moving in the right direction, and we will in fact, to use the member's words, have a better year.

The lower Athabasca regional plan is absolutely critical in the development of that. I take some umbrage – I guess that is a word that might fit – from this member suggesting that we need to have a better year when his party seems to be doing everything that is within their power to delay or destroy the impetus on Alberta land stewardship legislation, which is the very essence of ensuring that we will, in his words, have a better year. It's all about cumulative effects management. It's about establishing legislation so that we can conserve land, so that we can put plans in place that bring about triggers and limits on air and water emissions that will allow us to once and for all demonstrate to Albertans, demonstrate to the world that we are serious about developing this critical resource in the most appropriate ways.

We are in the later stages of developing a tailings management program. Just this week I made an announcement that I think is really quite monumental when it comes to reclamation, talking about putting the plans in place to initiate emphasis on progressive reclamation, transparency so that Albertans, our customers, can see the work that's under way with respect to reclamation. We had discussions earlier this afternoon about the panel that's now developing a world-class monitoring system not just for the Athabasca region but for all of Alberta, but the target will initially be on the Athabasca region.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Okay. Thank you. I only have one or two other final questions. You made reference to a political party. It's very clear that we do believe that the bill that you made reference to certainly should be repealed and rescinded. When we have strong environmental licences and acts in place such as the Water Act and others, the fact that they can be usurped by a cabinet based on how they feel – and the cabinet is not like a council or a public meeting – is unfortunate. And it's unfortunate that I'm out of my time.

**The Chair:** You're right, hon. member.

The next 20 minutes is reserved for the fourth party. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you have 20 minutes of dialogue with the minister.

**Ms Notley:** Thank you. I think in this particular case what I'm going to do is just do the 10 minutes, I'm afraid, because I found it doesn't really work as well in this setting to do the back and forth when you have such a short period of time. It frustrates me because I have so, so, so many issues to go over here, and it's going to be difficult.

However, I'd like to start by thanking the minister and his staff for being here to provide us with information and, also, his staff for having provided some very detailed information after the last set of estimates in response to our researchers' requests. I do appreciate that. I also appreciate the fact that this minister on a personal level does a very good job of being very sort of moderate and reasoned and measured in his responses. I think that's good because he really is a target in a lot of cases.

Having said that – and I continue to believe that to be the case very much with the minister – overall I have to say that when I started preparing for this and I started reading my estimates notes and the estimates debate from three years ago and then two years ago and then last year and then I started looking over at everything that's been happening and then I started looking at the budget, quite frankly, Mr. Minister, you may not believe this, but I fully believe that your cabinet has essentially thrown you under the bus. Repeatedly you are put in a position where you are being asked to defend an increasingly indefensible environmental record and certainly in this case an environmental budget which is absolutely indefensible at this point. I feel for you because you do it with as much grace as one can in the situation that you are in.

I do believe that what we see here today in terms of the budget for Environment and the record of this ministry over the last year is a clear indication that this government has abandoned this issue as any form of priority. Where do I see that reflected, and where are there some questions that you might be able to answer? Well, obviously, I think there's already been some indication about what the budget reflects overall. Since 2002 in real dollars we've seen compliance and enforcement down by about 13 per cent, but we've seen communications up by about 50 per cent. That's in sort of a real dollar thing.

Even with the discussion about the change in contributions to the climate change emissions fund and the fact that you paid out last year to settle a legal account that was not anticipated, ultimately we still see from last year's budget, not forecast but budget, to this year a \$10 million cut in funding for this ministry, that we see primarily existing in the climate change line item. That's after you take into the account the fund issue. So you're still seeing an overall reduction in costs.

Now, how does that work? Well, in the last year we've seen repeated critiques of the quality of work that happens within this ministry. We've seen from the Royal Society of Canada: "The regional cumulative impact on groundwater quantity and quality has not been assessed." Another quote: "[The] regulatory capacity of the Alberta and Canadian Governments does not appear to have kept pace" with the rapid expansion. Another quote: "The Government of Alberta has a government-wide portal on its website to address oil sands, but the current content is largely public relations documents regarding the industry." Another quote:

The ERCB faces difficult public interest determinations on future projects unless these information deficiencies, especially on cumulative impacts, are corrected. Accordingly, the necessary studies need to be completed with highest priority to assure a sound evidence basis for the public interest decisions . . . on project applications.

Meanwhile, they say, there is little tangible progress in current regulatory policy as it relates to cumulative impacts assessment. So that's there.

Then, of course, we've already talked about the Schindler report.

Then, of course, we have the report that your own panel released two or three weeks ago that identified that in many cases your folks were not asking the right questions, were not testing for the right chemicals, and in many cases do not even have the technical capacity to measure a number of the chemicals and toxins that need to be tested for.

So that's the overview, just in terms of monitoring. Yet we see no extra resources going into monitoring, and we have an oil sands panel, that we've talked about in many different forums, which is fundamentally flawed. But even if it weren't fundamentally flawed, there's no money in your budget to raise your gain at all this year, at the same time that the government is estimating and planning for increased industrial activity in the very areas that require your ministry's concerted, increased attention with a much, much higher level of quality. To me it's a clear decision to abandon what you've been told needs to happen.

4:50

I'd like to quickly go to 4.2, approvals. I've heard you, when we've talked about issues related to monitoring and compliance and spot checks, a lot of time refer to how, well, the approval process is the process by which we make sure that all the ducks are in order – perhaps a bad turn of phrase – but, nonetheless, that everything is in order and it unfolds properly down the road. But we see a 6 per cent decrease there, and after inflation it's more like a 10 per cent decrease in that line item.

I have a few questions with respect to that. I'm wondering within that line item how much money is spent on consultants as opposed to staff, so third-party consultants. I'm wondering if you could advise me of the breakdown of approvals that are reviewed by consultants versus approvals that are reviewed by direct staff and the percentage of each. Then you can tell me whether or not your ministry has a policy or practice in place with respect to ensuring that those consultants do not have current or adjacent contracts with industry, because that's a definite problem, so I'm wondering if you can provide an answer to that question.

With respect to general enforcement I see that we've had in 2005 roughly about 83 people employed as either investigators or other types of enforcement officers and that in 2010 that number was down to 82, which is fine. It has basically kept pace. There were a couple of vacancies. Again, the question becomes: with all the increased activity over that period of time, how in heaven's name can you maintain the same quality of monitoring enforcement and compliance with those numbers in place?

Cumulative effects. We've had some fabulous conversations about cumulative effects management over the course of the last three years. I remember being so excited when I first heard that stuff being talked about, when I heard about it in the context of the land-use framework and I heard about the critical role that the ministry plays in terms of providing the science to inform that process and to inform each regional plan. But here we are three years later: no movement.

In estimates last year we were promised – I think it was the second or third deadline – that the lower Athabasca land-use framework would be completed by December 2010, and it's not. Again. And it's the one that's furthest ahead. I know that there have been commitments that this would all be completed by 2012, but based on what's happened thus far, I'm just wondering if at some point the minister is prepared to acknowledge that it's not going to get done, that you're grossly behind unless there's a doubling of your budget.

You'd be happy to know – I mean, I've said it publicly in front of the cameras – that as a starting point I could absolutely and completely, with full confidence, double your budget and not

think for a second that I was being irresponsible with taxpayers' money because I believe that the disparity between what needs to happen and what is happening is so great, not only quantitatively but qualitatively, that that's what needs to happen. Having said that, the question becomes: are you prepared to acknowledge that the land-use framework and the regional cumulative effects plans are not going to be completed by the spring of 2012? It's very clear that we haven't got one of the nine complete, let alone all of them.

Directive 074. Last year we talked about how only 2 out of 7 companies that had been assessed under that had met compliance. Now we're at 2 out of 9. I am concerned about why that is and, of course, the fact that they intend not to be in compliance at least two years out from now. It's not a question of just right that minute they weren't in compliance; we're planning for at least two years of noncompliance past this year. I'm curious about the reclamation program, why that didn't include tailings.

I'm also wondering – oh, I'm running out of time, and this is so frustrating for me – if you could tell me why there was no inclusion of a third-party review of industry reclamation costs given the clear academic and objective consensus that industry does nothing but underestimate reclamation costs every time that issue has been discussed, yet we have no third-party reclamation process, which is going to undermine economic growth in the future as well and undermine the economic stability of the industries.

Orphan wells fund. Your ministry is responsible for signing off on reclamation: \$30 million over the last two years. How many of them have been reclaimed as a result of that investment?

Finally, why was there no . . . [A timer sounded] Sorry.

**The Chair:** Hon. Minister, you have a maximum of 10 minutes to answer those questions.

**Mr. Renner:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I almost feel like starting at the bottom because I'd like to get to those questions first, but I won't. I will try and get through all of the questions.

First of all, I want to thank the member for her kind comments. I think she was genuine in offering them, and I hope that I do bring a reasoned approach to this ministry. At times it is difficult to remain calm, but the fact of the matter is that this is an important position. It is critical that we get it right not only because of the expectations that Albertans have, but this is also a critical building foundation for future generations to continue to have success here in Alberta.

The ministry budget is, I think, not unlike any other ministry budget in government. If we had opportunities to have bigger budgets, we would certainly find all kinds of worthwhile places to spend them. However, we're no different than any other department. We have to work within the overall restraints and constraints that are put in place if we're going to manage the dollars in an appropriate way. Yeah, I wish at times that I would have opportunity to have more budget, but I don't. So I'm a pragmatist when it comes to that, and I say: okay; given the constraints that we're under, how can we make sure that we accomplish everything that we possibly can with the dollars that are available to us?

I do want to point out that the member suggested there is a \$10 million cut in our climate change budget. I don't know if she heard earlier, but the reason for that is that we have reassessed the estimate on our CCEMC, the climate change emissions fund, through offsets.

I want to talk about the concerns around money for the monitoring panel report because it's critical that everyone understands that at the end of the day the expectation is that industry is going to continue to pay for the lion's share of costs associated with im-

plementing this report. There will undoubtedly be dollars that will have to be incorporated from Alberta Environment's budget, there may be some dollars, frankly, that will come from SRD's budget, and there will probably also be a certain amount of dollars that come through Environment Canada from a monitoring perspective. But the lion's share of the costs needs to be and will continue to be borne by industry. The issue at hand is: how can we have a system where the lion's share of the costs is borne by industry but industry is not in control nor is industry seen to be in control of how those costs are expended? That's a critical part of the work that the panel has before them.

I think it's also worth noting on the issue of industry involvement that one of the line items in climate change is reflective of the fact that we have these funds that flow through our department from compliance costs associated with CO<sub>2</sub> mitigation.

5:00

I was participating a couple of weeks ago, maybe three weeks ago, with a funding announcement that was made by the Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation, where they were allocating about – I can't remember if it was \$20 million or \$30 million. They pointed out at that point that to date about a hundred million dollars has been awarded to various organizations for this fund, but the leveraging that takes place as a result of the criteria that's used to determine where these various grants go will result in about \$500 million in expenditures. Now, some of those go into commercialization of projects around the province. Some of them go into research projects. So you have to keep in context that not all of the dollars that are being spent as a result of the policies of Alberta Environment are necessarily reflected in Alberta Environment's budget.

You asked how many approvals are reviewed by consultants, and I can honestly say that the answer is zero, none. We do have consultants from time to time that we'll bring in to assist us in the evaluation and development of policy or putting on various kinds of consultations and workshops and the like. There are consultants that industry will engage to put together proposals that come to our department. But at the end of the day there is never an approval granted by our department that is not reviewed and signed off by one of our employees. We do not delegate that authority to nonemployees.

The budget itself in approvals: the member wondered why it had actually gone down, and there is a very simple explanation. It's because within approvals we have some flow-throughs as well. It's primarily due to dedicated revenue shortfalls where fewer applications were received for reclamation and remediation certificates, resulting in fewer site audits being conducted. The \$1.6 million decrease shown in the estimates is due to reduced dedicated funding required under the reclamation and remediation programs. So these are programs that are flow-through dollars. People come to us, they pay their fee, and we process their application. If there are fewer applications, then the revenue is less.

I'm pleased to report on the enforcement side that in the last five years our complement of staff has actually increased by 10 per cent. We now have environmental protection officers that number in total 85, and that is up seven over the last five years from where we were.

She asked: will the land-use framework ever be completed? Yes. The answer is yes. In fact, I am very encouraged by the work that's under way, particularly on the lower Athabasca. The lower Athabasca is the first out of the chute. The South Saskatchewan River basin is the second out of the chute. Both of those are moving along very well. I encourage the member to continue to stay interested and involved. I want to make it abundantly clear once

again that it is the essence of our go-forward ability to continue to do what we do in Environment on cumulative effects, and our whole regulatory approach is enveloped within the land-use framework. We are moving forward, and the member will see very well that that's the case.

Directive 074. She says that many are not in compliance. It is, I think, important to keep our eyes clearly focused on the end result. Directive 074 talks about the need to be in compliance and to implement over a period of time, but at the end of the day there needs to be a plan that says that we will no longer be increasing the amount of tailings that we produce. I'm confident that all of the mining companies will in fact be able to accomplish that by the end of the day. Some of them will not be able to implement as quickly the technology that will get them there, but by the end of the day they will be there.

Then, frankly, the focus has to be on the area that we are now focusing on, that you made reference to, and that's tailings management, to deal with the legacy ponds. Directive 074 only deals with the production of tailings on a go-forward basis, but everyone knows that we've got tailings ponds that are there from the last 20 years of production in that area. So it needs to have a combined approach. Directive 074 ends the increase of tailings, but then we are working very aggressively with industry. Industry, to their credit, is working equally as hard on developing policies that will allow them to deal with the legacies as well as the existing.

**The Chair:** We now get to the next 20 minutes. Hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, do you wish to exchange for 20 minutes?

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes, Mr. Chair. If we could go to a back and forth, I would like that very much.

I'm going to start out by seeing if I can get a direct answer to what I thought my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona put forward as a rather direct question, which is about these land-use plans. When are they going to get done? When can we expect the lower Athabasca to be done? When can we expect the other watersheds to be done as well, Minister? Specific dates, please.

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Chairman, the Minister of SRD is ultimately responsible for the development of these plans. I cannot give a direct answer to that question because it will depend very much upon a number of factors. The lower Athabasca is the one that we are focusing on now. The intention is to have that one completed this year. Let me say that. The South Saskatchewan is at a different stage.

For the lower Athabasca we've already received the report back from the regional advisory committee. That report has been the subject of public consultation, and now it's in the government's court to respond and bring out a document that is the government's response. That's the next step. Then there is further time for further input and consultation on that report. The way that the program is designed to work is that based upon that final round of consultation, the final plan is then put into place.

On the South Saskatchewan the RAC, the regional advisory council, has submitted their report, and it will be subject to that next round of consultation very soon. We just have to ensure that we have the resources to be able to deal with it in a timely manner. But, clearly, the sooner the better as far as I'm concerned because it does give us the opportunity to really get rolling and get moving on cumulative effects.

[Dr. Brown in the chair]

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you. Clearly, we're running significantly behind schedule in terms of what the original goals were for having those plans done.

I guess that brings up another question. I'll refer you back, Minister, to your ministry's goal one that environmental outcomes and objectives are established with Albertans, communities, government, and industry. The overarching objective is integrating those efforts, I think, and working together to achieve outcomes that work for all parties. I would argue that the stakeholders are listed in order of priority there. It's Albertans who create the communities, who elect governments to represent them, and upon whom industry depends.

I think the Castle special management area – and I know that we're talking about land that falls under the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development because I already went through this dance with the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. But I would argue that her ministry has an interest in the outcome of this discussion as does your ministry. The Castle special management area is, I think, a good example, or maybe a bad example, of this government missing the importance of Albertans and of the community as development of this area is set to go ahead despite protests from the local people there and in spite of the fact that we are slowly getting going with the South Saskatchewan plan.

5:10

Priority initiative 1.1 says:

Lead Alberta's transition to an outcomes-focused environmental cumulative effects management system within Alberta's Land-use Framework to address the impacts of development on land, air, water and biodiversity, at a regional and provincial level.

This case relates directly to that priority initiative. It shows the importance of establishing these regional plans that can protect areas of environmental significance – I think this is an area of extreme environmental significance – and perhaps, more importantly, it shows the necessity of having interim planning strategies in the absence of regional plans. What process does your ministry have or does this government have for environmental protection and conservation prior to the establishment of these regional plans?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, the process that we have is the legislation that I and my staff operate under, and that's the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act of Alberta, EPEA. That's the bible in our department that is constantly referred to. It is a robust piece of legislation.

I think one of the areas that often gets overlooked is that every approval that is made by our department of any kind is subject to public notice. Then when there are statements of concern that arise out of that public notice, the applicant is required to address those statements of concern. Approval is then made based on both the statements of concern and on our existing environmental policies that are in place under EPEA and other pieces of legislation. Finally, every decision is also subject to appeal. We have an independent appeal board that deals with the most contentious decisions and I think does a very good job of (a) mediating where mediation is possible and (b) making sound and appropriate recommendations to the minister for implementation.

**Mr. Taylor:** Two follow-up questions, if I may, Minister. What role did your ministry have to play in the block-cutting applications as far as the Castle special management area is concerned? How vigorously have you been in there advocating for protection of that land? It seems that there is significant local concern that the environmental integrity of that area is being forever compromised, and it's doing so because one ministry, SRD, is allowing logging to go ahead in an area that another ministry, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, thinks should be a park, if I understood the minister correctly when we talked about this last week. It has

clearly got some environmental significance, so I think, you know, at some point this falls into your lap as well.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, there are a number of ministries that are involved with this area. I am not going to stand here and contradict the fine work that's done by some of those 2,000 individuals that work in Sustainable Resource Development. I had the conversation with the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

The fact is that forest management is something that needs to take place on an ongoing basis. I don't begin to present myself as an expert, but I do know, having had the opportunity to explore parts of the world down in southwestern Alberta, not necessarily the specific area of the Castle that you're referring to but I have spent days and days and days wandering around in the Crowsnest area, that most of that area at one point in our history was logged. In fact, most of the access roads that everyone uses to recreate in that area are as the result of many years of logging history in that area, so I won't accept that the only way to preserve an area, to manage an area and ensure that we have a healthy environment on a go-forward basis is to prohibit logging in the area. Sometimes it makes sense to have logging in an area because it replaces what used to be resolved by Mother Nature through fires and the like. Let's look at this from the perspective of: what is the best for managing this area?

I heard today in question period that the Minister of SRD indicated that the vast majority of the land in that particular region will not be accessible to logging. It's only a very small proportion of the land that's accessible, and even at that it's a hundred-year program, so 1 per cent annual cut. We can't let this get drawn out of proportion.

**Mr. Taylor:** Yet it has raised such a stink among the local community. One member of this House has tabled over a thousand e-mails so far, I believe, complaining about the logging. So how does the minister square that circle? Somewhere here either there has been a failure to protect that area or a failure to communicate to the people who live in the area, who live near the area, who recreate in the area, who in some cases depend on the area for their own livelihood, who see the ecotourism value of the area that in fact everything is just hunky-dory. So which failure is it?

**Mr. Renner:** I'm not going to engage in this discussion any longer because it's not an area that my ministry is responsible for. But I'll give an example for an area that we are responsible for, and that's landfills. There are thousands of people who oppose landfill applications as well. Are you suggesting that we shouldn't have landfills? No, I don't think anyone would suggest that. What we have to do is ensure that when a landfill is developed, it's developed in a way that ensures that there are no adverse impacts on the environment, so we have very rigid and detailed specifications on how landfills are developed.

But at the end of the day, would I like to live next door to a landfill? No, I wouldn't. Nevertheless, I recognize that somebody has to because I'm not nor are Albertans at the point now where they're no longer generating any refuse, and if we don't have a landfill to put it in, it ends up in somebody else's front yard. So there are occasions where decisions need to be made that have much more than local concerns when it comes to these kinds of decisions on developments within the environmental landscape.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay. A pretty impassioned defence for something that you weren't going to get involved in any longer. I do hope that while you're applying your stringent regulations around landfills and all the rest, your ministry is doing everything in its power

to ensure that we put less into landfills generally, so we don't need so many of them in the future.

I want to move on to another area, page 71 of the fiscal plan. I think it's not a point for argument that Energy and Environment are tightly linked in this province, that they have to be tightly linked in this province. In 2010-11 the gap between expenses in Energy and Environment is expected to be about \$49 million, with Energy forecast at \$358 million and Environment at \$309 million. For 2011-12 it's expected to be a gap of \$155 million. By 2013-14 there's a forecasted gap of \$538 million, with Energy expenses forecast at \$781 million and Environment at \$246 million.

It would seem to me that as energy development proceeds apace in this province, environmental protection should as well. So based on these numbers, expenses in Energy are going to overshadow any necessary increases in environmental funding. Why does this gap exist? Why are the departments trending in opposite directions? How can Alberta's environment keep up with Alberta's energy development if adequate funding is not provided?

5:20

**Mr. Renner:** I think, with respect, it is a bit of an apples-to-oranges comparison. The work that Energy does is largely an auditing, tax collection kind of a business. A lot of what Energy does is on royalties, collecting the royalties, and all of the administration that is involved with auditing and ensuring that the appropriate royalties are paid. They also are responsible for land sales and all of the administration around that end of the business.

Energy is not actually directly involved on the environmental side except through the arm that is the ERCB, and the ERCB is funded jointly by industry and by Energy. So there is a growth that takes place there that if you cut through all of the grants that Energy has within their budget, the programs that Energy has within their budget, and similar kinds of nonrelated programs within our budget, I think you'll find that generally speaking the dollars that are specifically involved in Energy have not grown at a pace that would exceed the similar circumstances in Environment.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay. Somebody needs to bring out a book called cross-ministerial responsibilities and provincial budgeting for dummies; there's no question about that. I wonder if the minister can tell me, getting back to the industry-funded approach to compliance, which you touched on just a minute ago with the ERCB and you talked about at some length in your exchange with my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona, for the average Joe out there in the real world is there a place that they can go that easily tallies up how much industry is contributing year in and year out so that we can make an apples-to-apples comparison there, so that we can see that as your budget is shrinking year over year, in fact it's more than being made up by the contributions that industry is making to compliance and to monitoring?

**Mr. Renner:** No, I don't think there is such a place. That's why when we talk about the need for additional transparency, we talk about the need for having a system in place that is not only credible but seen to be credible. That's an important part of it, and on a go-forward basis that has to be part of the new-look monitoring system that goes in place.

We've also directed the panel to present us with a web-based information portal where the public would have access to that kind of information plus all of the other data that would be gathered through the system.

**Mr. Taylor:** When can we expect to see that?

**Mr. Renner:** Well, the report is due back from the panel in June of this year. I'm expecting that to be a fairly high-level report. They will drive down the details, and I would hope that portions of that panel recommendation could be put into force and implemented probably as early as next fiscal year.

**Mr. Taylor:** Okay. Thank you for that, Minister.

Carbon capture and storage. The capital plan this year includes \$70 million in fiscal 2011-12, \$518 million over the next three years for carbon capture and storage projects. I'm told that you're working hard on finalizing agreements with the proponents of the four major projects announced in 2009. I was approached by people involved in one of those projects just last week – I won't mention which one – and they expressed some concern that they need to get into a position in the not-too-distant but not immediate future to be able to decide from a company standpoint whether they want to fund the project going forward or not, and they're curious as to when the agreements may be finalized. So I wonder if you can speak to that to some extent and give us some sense of how this is progressing and when these four projects might be expected to get off the ground.

**Mr. Renner:** I can't speak to the four specific projects in anything other than general terms. The CCS budget is in Energy, not Environment. The responsibility of Environment is through the legislation that we have in place from a climate change perspective. We regulate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. We will be responsible for regulating the approvals necessary to actually initiate action to get these facilities up and running, but the dollars allocated to the program will be under Energy.

There may be an ancillary role for Environment as we begin to have discussions around how we deal with . . . [A timer sounded] Is that the time? I'll just finish my statement, and then we'll move on.

We also have the carbon offset program, so there are ongoing discussions as to whether or not CO<sub>2</sub> that is injected through some kind of a CCS project would be eligible for recognition under an offset program. There may be a role for us there at some point in the future.

**The Acting Chair:** The chair will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre. Do you wish to share your 20 minutes with the minister?

**Ms Blakeman:** Of course I can share my time with the minister. I'm going to try and run through my questions on oil sands reclamation, alternative energy and conservation, climate change, and cumulative effects.

Starting with reclamation, under priority initiative 3.3, which is on page 58 of the business plan, it says to "develop and implement the Progressive Reclamation Strategy." My question is: what line item in the estimates reflects the development of the strategy, and where are the costs of the implementation? So two different parts of it, and if you can tell me where those are, that would be great.

Now, in the news release that came out around the March 17 announcement about the new reclamation security strategy, the government claims that transparency and consistency of reporting would be increased. Again, can you tell me how much the increased reporting would cost annually, and where would I find it? Additionally, if you need more staff members around this increased transparency and consistency of reporting, how many new staff members, if any, would be hired to track this rate of reclamation? I do note that you've had no change in FTEs from last year to this year, so I'm wondering if you're losing some somewhere else in order to put that in place.

On the same topic, if you could share with me the costs that are associated with the new website. Congratulations on that. That's a great idea. I think that will be very interesting for people. But I'm interested in what the costs are and, again, where they're reflected in the budget. Don't spend a lot of time on this, but I want to encourage the minister to put as much information on that site as possible.

I'm quite taken with the city of Edmonton's commitment to open data, in which they put all their information that they regularly keep onto their website and allow other people to use it in different ways. They ended up with an excellent bus app that you can get on your phone. Because all of their information about bus routes and stops and the numbers on them were all online, somebody else came along and developed an app out of it. You know, someone else took advantage of that. Now you can go to any bus stop, plug in the number, and find out when the next bus is coming.

I want to encourage you to put as much information up on that site as possible. I know that that runs a little bit counter to this government's kind of tight holding and centralization of information, but I think it'll help you in the long run.

On the same topic around the liabilities, the Pembina Institute has pointed out that there's about \$15 billion in liability that is not covered. I'm wondering if the government has any plans to cover that liability before they move on to this new program and deal with new liability that they are creating in ongoing – what's the word everyone uses now? – go-forward oil sands projects and reclamation projects. You've got \$15 billion that's sitting there now with a whole bunch of other things; now you're going to have a new program. Are you going to cover that \$15 billion, or are you just going to move forward from today?

5:30

This is actually a point that Avril came up with, and it's a really good one. The ministry consistently works under the assumption that the oil industry isn't going anywhere and that it's going to continue to operate at what we know and understand today and that everything will stay on more or less the same track. What is the ministry forecasting for growth in the oil sands, and how long is that concept of today? For anyone reading *Hansard*, I'm doing air quotes around the word "today." How long is that going to last? I'm thinking there are a lot of very bright people up there with a lot of technology at their disposal. I'm assuming the oil sands should be moving forward technologically, but I don't see what the ministry is doing moving along at the same time. I hope that made sense to you. I'll let the minister respond to that.

**Mr. Renner:** Okay. The issue of progressive reclamation is part of our policy innovation, line 2.4. That's where it would be developed. Progressive reclamation is an add-on to MFSP, the mine financial security policy. The cost of administering that is still under development. The program itself will have to become implemented over time.

There are two aspects that we have to work on. The first one is to determine: what is the base security deposit that has to be held, particularly if we see new mines come on, both coal mines and, more particularly, oil sands mines? The cost of compliance and audit will be built into our budget over time, but at initial stages there won't be a significant additional cost.

I want to deal with this issue of liability and the reference to the Pembina Institute estimate that there's a \$15 billion liability. There's a very basic assumption that comes to that \$15 billion, and that assumption is that virtually no reclamation takes place until the very end of life, that you mine the life out for the 20 or 30

or 40 years during the life of the mine and you do virtually nothing. At the end of the mine's life there could be \$15 billion in liability.

But that's not the way it works, and it's certainly not the way it works under progressive reclamation, which is what this is all about. It's about doing everything that can be possibly done at earlier stages to leave a minimal amount of reclamation that's done at the end of the mine's life. That's why, as we begin to approach the point where we start to ramp up the reclamation, the amount of reclamation will be dependent upon the amount of work that has already taken place. If a significant amount of work has already taken place, the amount of reclamation would be less.

Thank you for the compliments on the website. I'm very pleased with it, and I think that there continues to be room for improvement. The cost was approximately a million dollars, I'm told, and that was part of the clean energy line item, 2.3.

I think the member's comments with respect to the more transparency the better is something that I fundamentally agree with. We do have issues that we have to constantly wrestle with over whether or not there is privacy, whether the information that we have is private, whether or not, you know, there's intellectual property or there's information that we hold that is not quite ready for the public domain, but I think that we're getting better and better at trying to move that out.

I was on the warpath a while ago because I was very upset that we continue to have all of the FOIP requests that we do given the fact that we had made a conscious effort to put a lot of that information onto a public portal. We actually had some great fanfare about saying: you can now go on our website, you can look at a piece of property, and you can get all of that information that you require with respect to environmental issues on that property. We continued to have all of these FOIP requests, so I said: why is it that we're doing this?

The staff have found out that not only does government take a long time to change its ways, but so does the private sector. Many of the law offices have kind of got it as a bit of a ritual that when you do a land transfer, one of the things you do is put in a FOIP request to the government. They're not completely convinced in their own minds that the amount of information that we put on this public access site is really all of it. "We got the information that you put on your public site, but we're not sure if we believe you or if it's all there. So just to make sure we cover all our bases, we're going to do a FOIP request as well."

That's also the reason why, then, there were reports that Environment had all of these FOIP requests where we responded: there are none. Well, those were the ones. We don't have anything that's not already on that public site. There was some confusion on how that reporting took place.

But I agree that the more transparent we can be the better. We are going to be striving to be as transparent as we possibly can, particularly with respect to oil sands.

The assumption that the member referred to on moving forward with new technology is one that we struggle with. Sometimes there is a hesitancy to give approvals to a company that comes to us with new technology. That's because regulators tend to be fairly risk averse. If your technology that you came to us with doesn't work, who's going to be left holding the bag? Is it you, or is it us? That's why I think that we need to have much more focus on this whole concept of outcomes-based regulation.

If we say to you, "You will have emissions coming out of your stack that are less than so many parts per billion, but we're not going to be prescriptive and tell you how to do it; you figure out how to do it" or "If you want to bring in a new piece of technology that we've never seen before, that's fine; you do it, but know

that at the end of the day if it doesn't work, it's not us that are responsible; it's going to be you, and you'll have to fix it," that is the difficulty. Oftentimes we have new technologies that are brought forward to us that, in the opinion of our staff, are not yet proven technologies, and we do have some difficulty in figuring out how to get those into an approval process.

We have something in the industry that's called BATEA, best available technology economically achievable. That's sort of the underlying criteria that we use now. It's known technology that's been used elsewhere. We've never figured out a way for us to actually take the risk and set the standard that others can follow because there is this aversion to taking that risk. What if it doesn't work?

5:40

**Ms Blakeman:** Interesting answer. Thank you very much.

Just two comments picking up on what the minister said. Now, you know, if you say that, well, you don't really know what the cost is yet because you still have a bunch of things to figure out, to that I say: well, how on earth did you come up with the numbers that are in the budget? If you didn't know what the numbers were, you must have guesstimated at something. So I'm not going to accept that comment from the minister that he can't tell me what any given thing cost because he hasn't quite worked it out. You must have put a budget figure in there to come up with the numbers that you've got.

The second thing is around that idea of progressive reclamation. I understand what you're doing, and I don't entirely disagree with you, but you are also putting that plan in. You are not going backwards and picking up all of the old sites that are there. You are going forward on that. You're picking up some old sites, but you're not picking up everything. You're not picking up that liability that's sitting there. So my argument around that is that you haven't picked up the entire liability that's out there for the taxpayer if things go wrong. You are more or less going forward from this day.

Now I'm going to change gears and talk about climate change. Sorry; that's a bit of a head-snapper. The minister has talked about the declines in the fund. Given that the ministry relies on the money from the climate change and emissions management fund and given that the ministry relies on that fund for climate change initiatives, are there plans to increase the \$15 levy in order to keep some money in that fund? If it just keeps going down because companies are buying offsets and that's the fund that you're relying on to pay for climate change initiatives, eventually we won't have enough money in there to do that. What's the consideration about that \$15 levy?

The larger conversation, which we don't have time to have here, is that that levy at \$15 is a joke because at this point I think the figure that's bandied about is 90 bucks a tonne. If you really want to see change in oil and gas – and I'll talk about conventional oil and gas and oil sands; they're two different things – you've got to get that number up to where it makes more economic sense to the companies to do something different than to just pay the levy as part of doing business. But we don't have time for that conversation.

Back to climate change again. If you're not going to increase that levy, then are you considering going from 100,000 tonnes, I think you've got, of greenhouse gas and reducing that to 50,000 tonnes for emitters being required to pay into that fund? That's another way of continuing to get money and at the same time incenting or disincenting the industry enough to change what they're doing. That's certainly a part of the environmental policy that I developed, that we would move that bar down so that it picked up the emitters that are in the 50,000-tonne range.

I also want to ask about line 2.2 of the estimates, climate change. I'm wondering what exactly this is used for. Is that all the tech fund, or is there anything else in there? I haven't heard the minister talk about anything else in any of the other questions others have asked him, so I'm looking for the list of what's covered under that particular line item.

The last bit is alternative energy. I'm wondering – again, this is a long conversation that we don't have time to have – why there is so little spent on clean energy and so little focus on clean energy in your business plan. If we're going to diversify the economy, if we're going to move forward, all those things we're always told, we need to look at more alternative clean energy. I'm just not seeing it, so why?

Under priority initiative 3.2 in the business plan it says that the climate change strategy is going to be updated. I'm wondering what exactly those changes are going to consist of. The minister has referred to the updates or the changes in the climate change strategy as well, and I don't know what that means, so if he can let us know.

On page 19 of the fiscal plan it talks about: over \$100 million is allocated to support various environmentally sustainable resource development plans. Could you provide a breakdown or point me to a website where there is a list of who is getting that hundred million dollars and how much each one gets? It turns up on page 19 of your fiscal plan. It's under Energy and Environment.

Over \$100 million to support various environmentally-sustainable resource development programs, including incentives for bio-energy product development, environmental monitoring and reporting, land stewardship and water management.

How are they breaking that up? Well, can I ask the minister to ask the President of the Treasury Board how they came up with that hundred million dollars? Specifically, I'd like to know how much is being allocated to the biofuel initiatives. It seems to me that there's a heck of a lot of money going into that sector to the detriment of other alternative energy and conservation sectors.

The last thing I have is cumulative effects management. There was a lot of emphasis on that two years ago, nothing in the budget last year, and now it's back in prime time. What did the government use last year to figure out exactly what the cumulative effects are going to be that he could use this year? I've watched that sort of development, and I think there was a lot of emphasis two years ago. Last year there was almost no discussion in the budget debates about it, and now it's back, you know, with bells and whistles and neon lights. What was the thinking? What's it going to look like to be implemented? What are the enforcement mechanisms that are going to be included in that?

**The Acting Chair:** Your speaking time has expired.

**Ms Blakeman:** Could you put me back on the list, please, Mr. Chairman? Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Do you wish to combine your speaking time?

**Ms Notley:** I will try combining this time and see how that goes. I think I've probably said this on previous occasions: short questions, short answers. If I interrupt, it's not to be combative. It's simply to move on to the next topic or to sort of ask a follow-up question or something like that. Just to sort of make sure that this is clear, I'm assuming that if you don't get to answering those questions on those issues that we have raised, they will be answered in written format and tabled, with all people getting copies of them. Is that correct? I understand that there was some incon-

sistency amongst the committees. We did get some of that information back subsequently, but I'm just ensuring because I do know that I had some questions that remain outstanding from our last round. I'm assuming that you'll get to those.

I wanted to start quickly. I'll deal with three issues together if I can. The first is with respect to the climate fund. You did speak about the \$100 million having been kicked out the door thus far, and you talked about the additional money leveraged there. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about the specific performance measures that the ministry or the fund is relying on in terms of ensuring that that money has been invested and created a project that reaches back to certain goals. The greater the specificity the better, of course, because subjective performance measures are not of value. Notwithstanding that industry is putting its own money into it, we are putting, essentially, regulatory money into that as well, so presumably we would have some fairly strong performance measures.

I did want to just start really quickly on the numbers with respect to the orphan wells, the number that have been reclaimed over the course of the last two years. Then in terms of the larger reclamation policy, the mine reclamation policy, we've had some debate on that issue both in the House as well as through the media, but I would like a more specific answer about why the reclamation policy, first of all, does not address issues with respect to initial land disturbance, doesn't look at postreclamation maintenance liability, and does not look at groundwater liability. My understanding is that those things are still not included in the definition of liability that would be covered under the reclamation program. If I'm mistaken, then I'm sure you'll be happy to correct me.

**5:50**

Then the other question with respect to that. The Member for Edmonton-Centre talked about the \$15 billion liability, but quite frankly my concern is the liability that Albertans stand to be facing 15, 20 years from now. The most conservative – the most conservative – of estimates around that are, as has been said, \$15 billion but also up to \$30 billion. Then, of course, we have the experience of Total recently in their application process having put forward their per-hectare reclamation estimates. Of course, if those were perceived to be the more accurate number, we'd actually be looking at more like a \$90 billion liability versus \$30 billion down the road. My question, of course, is: how is it that we think that \$6 billion by 2030 can possibly leave Albertans in a position where their liability is covered?

Linked to that, then, is this whole issue of having third-party verification of the liability estimates provided by industry. As I stated before, there's a long documented history of industry, whether intentionally or unintentionally, underestimating liability. It's not only a question for Alberta taxpayers in ensuring that the liability is properly estimated, but it's also, frankly, a question ultimately for shareholders. We may actually find that, you know, the stock markets and various regulations governing how these companies function in other settings will demand a clear estimation of liability just on behalf of shareholders. But I'm not here to advocate for oil company shareholders. I'm here to advocate for Alberta taxpayers. So I want to know why we're not looking more clearly at a third-party liability verification system because that's not currently included in the reclamation policy. To me that seems to be a tremendous shortcoming.

I'll stop there and then move on to some other issues. That gives you about five minutes unless I interrupt you.

**Mr. Renner:** Well, thanks for the short question. I'll try and give you an equally short answer. The performance measures for the

Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation are within the corporation. I think it's important to note that if we are going to be managing this as an arm's-length corporation, then we have to be careful that we do not try and exert too much direction over that board.

The Auditor General makes it very clear that if an organization is under the care, control, and custody of the minister, then that corporation needs to be part of the minister's consolidated reporting. That would be very problematic in this case because part of the process for consolidated reporting is that funds must be expended in the same year that they are collected, and it doesn't allow for the kind of flexibility that this corporation has to have when it signs some of these agreements with these proponents that maybe will have funds that will be paid out as various benchmarks are achieved over a period of time.

I can't include in my business plan the performance indicators or the performance measures, but I will refer the member to CCEMC's website. They have one. It's very clear what they use as criteria for establishing value for dollars from their perspective. If you don't find what you're looking for there, then refer back to our office.

The orphan well program is not part of Alberta Environment; it's in Alberta Energy. So I can't give you statistics on the orphan well program.

**Ms Notley:** But your staff are responsible for inspecting.

**Mr. Renner:** No, our staff are responsible for issuing reclamation certificates.

**Ms Notley:** Exactly. So that's why I'm asking you to tell me how many reclamation certificates have been issued.

**Mr. Renner:** Okay. Forty-four orphan sites received reclamation certificates in '09-10. The Orphan Well Association is estimating reclamation certificates for 40 more sites in '10-11.

The mine financial security policy: much discussion on that and much discussion around liability. I can assure you that in the calculation of liability all of the criteria that would lead to liability will be used in the calculation. This is a program that is designed to put some assurance in place that the taxpayer is not going to be left holding the bag, but it's also a program that is designed to acknowledge that there is value in the asset that's left in the mine at early stages. At early stages the cost of reclamation is far exceeded by the value of the resource that's still left in the ground. We then put a care-and-custody deposit in place. Should the current operator abandon that mine, it would revert to the Crown, and we would be responsible for care and custody until we could find someone else who would take over the mining of that resource and would also therefore take over the financial responsibility for reclamation.

At later stages that same ratio doesn't apply, and that's why we've talked about the need for a 3 to 1 ratio, 3 to 1 asset to liability. At later stages it's either when the 3 to 1 asset to liability is no longer applicable or 15 years left in mine life. That's when it kicks in that they have to start contributing security on an annual basis. That's where the calculation is made for what is the appropriate amount of security, and that is a calculation that will be part of the transparency. The way that the calculation is arrived at will be part of the disclosure and the transparency of the program. It is something that is not simply calculated by industry but is jointly arrived at between industry and government.

You know, the member has suggested that a third party needs to be involved. I would suggest that she's almost answered her own question. A third party is involved because once it gets to be that

transparent, then the company's own auditors, our auditors are going to be examining this to ensure that these are appropriate levels that are in place.

I'm not so sure that that third-party verification is not already in place with the Auditor General in Alberta, who will review those, as he already has and pointed out to us that work needs to be done, and we've now done that work. I would suggest to the member that as we become increasingly more transparent, as she's already pointed out, the shareholders will hold the companies accountable through their auditor as well and ensure that there is appropriate disclosure on their financial statements also.

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

**Ms Notley:** Well, thank you for that answer. I think the problem is that we don't currently have the transparency, and we currently have a plan that's estimating a certain amount of money. There's nothing in the plan that suggests that we're going to change the way we identify what we've already identified as the liability. I mean, we've already made assumptions about liability, and the process for making those assumptions has not been transparently disclosed.

The plan itself includes assumptions about liability right now that are not clearly explained, so that problem continues. You know, you're quite right that the Auditor General started out by identifying that we don't have enough security, but I suspect that if we go back into it, we'll find that we still don't have enough clarity around how the liability is calculated. As I say, I don't know exactly how Total came up with a number that was three times what the assumption is in the ministry's plan for this reclamation, but I do know that they did. This is concerning. I'm not an expert, so I'd like an objective expert. Just the same way we've needed objective experts who are scientists to come in and tell us that our monitoring really hasn't been so great for the last many years, we need that independence for this.

6:00

I'd like to go on as well that we still have a problem with the 3 to 1. I'm concerned that we're still short even with your explanation up to now.

I had a quick question just to follow up on the orphan wells. With the \$20 million having been added to the fund by the taxpayer last year, for the year '10-11, I'm a little concerned that we haven't seen a significant increase in the number of reclamations through that fund. In fact, we see a slight decrease. Yet we spent \$20 million last year. My question is whether people who are issuing those reclamation certificates in your ministry anticipate a big bump this year to account for that fairly significant public investment.

With respect to the land-use framework and cumulative effects my colleague from Calgary-Currie asked the question: well, while we're waiting endlessly for the land-use framework and for the cumulative effects program to be put in place, what are we doing? The minister responded by saying: well, we do what we've always done; we've got our monitoring that we've always had in place there. That's fine except that what we've had over the last 12 months is a lot of third-party assessment and identification that what we've got in place right now is not good enough. We've got an oil sands panel, and we're waiting until June for them to report. Then I suspect they'll come up with some process, and if it looks anything at all like the land-use framework and the cumulative effects management, we could be two or three years down the road before we get any kind of substantive change in how monitoring and approvals and measuring and all that kind of work is done.

My concern continues to be that right now we seem to be really good at carrying on with industrial application reviews and approvals, but we're not so good at moving forward in an effective and fast way to ensure that we're actually measuring the right stuff before we approve development. So I'm asking you to deal with the fact that: are you prepared to acknowledge that there has been some third-party expert assessment that what we're doing right now is not good enough? What do we do while we wait for the process to complete, where we figure out how to make it better? In the meantime we're not stopping development, so what are we doing in the meantime?

I want to ask a final question because I suspect you'll use the rest of the time for answering these questions. With respect to this issue of monitoring you say: oh, it's not a question of just looking at the budget being reduced or staying the same or whatever because always remember that once we come up with our fabulous new model, industry will still be doing the bulk of the monitoring and will still be paying for this. But the problem, which is very clear through RAMP, is that when industry is paying for it, there is no public accountability; there's no transparency. You've identified that. You've totally identified that, and that's good, and I'm glad that some of that work is going to be considered through the work of the oil sands panel.

My question is simply this. Not only does the process of monitoring have to be public in how they spend their money and where they spend their money and what kind of monitoring they use and what kind of measures they use and how often they do it – all of that has to be public – but the results have to be public. If we end up with a monitoring system that is not entirely, entirely transparent, with no regard for any of this proprietary interest crap – and I use that word quite intentionally – that puts a barrier between the public and their ability to assure that their lands and air and water are safe and what's actually going on, then it's not good enough. So my question is: is there a commitment that we will no longer be dealing with the kinds of barriers between public access to information and industry payment of monitoring when you move forward with whatever your new plan is, which I'm sure will be ready to go in June?

**Mr. Renner:** I didn't think I would get time to respond. Thank you.

Very quickly on orphan wells. Again, it's Energy that has the responsibility. I'm told – because I've asked the same question, quite frankly – that the majority of the wells that were reclaimed under the funding that we injected were some of the worst ones, some of the most expensive ones so that the number of certificates is somewhat reflective of the fact that some of these were very expensive projects to get work done on. So a reminder that that orphan well program is a program that deals with very old sites that were abandoned long ago and the owners can no longer be traced. If we know who did it, they'll be paying themselves.

Let me get to this whole issue of: why do we continue to allow development if we don't have an adequate monitoring system? Every one of the reports that we've seen has indicated that there is room for improvement – and we have said there is room for improvement – but no one has suggested that we are at a point where there is no additional room within some kind of a reasonable regulatory program. When we talk about cumulative effects, cumulative effects is all about putting management triggers in place and putting a system in place where you put limits. For example, we've now got limits in place for the Industrial Heartland, for that area, and the limits are far in excess of what the current development is. They would pose some, I guess, pressure on all of the development. If all of the upgraders that had been contemplated for that part of the world had gone ahead, we would have

had to make some very difficult decisions on how we're going to maintain that new development and stay within a current limit.

The same thing applies in the oil sands. We're talking about a regime where the limits that would be put in place to the point where we would have to take some serious action far exceed where we are at now. We're in the process of putting together the land-use framework. We're putting in the monitoring program that will help us to determine where to go in the future, not today or tomorrow.

**The Chair:** All right. We have the last seven minutes.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks very much. I'm just going to pick up on some of the things I sort of left on the table. I do want to pick up on the monitoring because I think this is where I fundamentally disagree with the government. I think it is a role of government to perform the monitoring because that is the only agency that can be absolutely impartial because they have no money-making that's on the line for that, no profit margin that's on the line, and can be seen as unbiased. I know it's expensive, but frankly I think that Albertans are willing to pay that price if they know that they're going to get that straight-across monitoring and that it is absolutely reliable because the government did it.

I don't think anybody trusts the stuff that industry does because it's that old thing about the fox looking after the henhouse. It just doesn't make sense to people. So I encourage the minister and I would certainly encourage his colleagues to support additional funds going into his money to cover that monitoring. I know it's a fundamental difference in ideology. I don't expect the minister to spring up and go, "I agree with you, Laurie," and that's the dividing line between us. I think that it's a function of government to do monitoring, not only in his department but everywhere else.

Okay. I had put some questions on the table around oil sands reclamation, some of which he's answered but not all, if your assistants are able to weed my stuff out of what he's answered in answering the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

I'd also talked about alternative energy and why there was so little emphasis and so little money put into it and how that was going to work inside of their climate change strategy. The breakdown of the hundred million, which he said he didn't know and I encouraged him to find out. The biofuels. The cumulative effects management. My last question on that is: can you provide more detail on what the cumulative effects for the lower Athabasca would look like? You started to talk about it, and I have notes somewhere, but if you can give us a bit more detail about exactly what it is you think that's going to be.

**6:10**

You talked a bit about limits, for example. I mean, in looking at what the Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council came forward with, they came forward with a recommendation of 80 per cent development, 20 per cent conservation. Is that the kind of limit that you're talking about? I don't think that's particularly going to fly. I know that with the cumulative effects management you're actually talking about, you know, limits of – what are you talking about? Is it like limits of so many particulates in the air and so much stuff in the water? He's nodding his head.

I'm wondering why that cumulative effects context was not in place before those regional advisory councils started to work. It seems to me that you're moving forward at the same time on a couple of different streams instead of having something set it out much more strongly coming from the policy direction.

Why don't you answer that? Thanks very much.

**Mr. Renner:** I want to deal with the last one first. The reason we haven't been able to implement cumulative effects yet is that the legislation that we have is focused on individual project-by-project regulation. When we give an approval to someone to emit something, whether it be particulates into the air or degree of a municipality to discharge their treated sewer into the river, it's all about that particular approval. We need the land-use framework and the lower Athabasca plan to talk about ambient air qualities and talk about total limits from all sources, not from individual sources. That's what will be in the plan.

There will be in that plan reference to air quality – total air quality, total emissions, total particulates in the air – and that's what we regulate to. It adds another degree of regulation. Not that we're going to forget about the individual approvals – they'll still be there – but we're also going to say that there comes a point where you can't have any more approvals because you're going to exceed the limit. If you're going to have more approvals, then you're going to have to do a better job on the downstream side to prevent those emissions in the first place, and in the absence of that, we can't do more approvals. That's what it's all about. That's literally what it's all about.

That's why it is such earth-breaking legislation. That's why I get so excited about it. I'm sure that you're going to quite enjoy reading the plan when it comes out.

The member talked about alternative energy and biofuel. Again, that's in Energy, not in our department. We have energy efficiency. We did the consumer rebate programs. We did those. But we don't have grants for biofuel. We don't have grants for alternative energy. That is Energy.

Finally, I won't say that I agree with you that government has to do monitoring. What I will agree with you on, though, is that industry cannot be seen to be in control. I don't know who's going to do the monitoring at the end of the day, but I do know that industry cannot be seen to be in control. It may be government that does it. It may be a different organization that does it. But, clearly, if we're going to have the credibility that we need to have, it has to be seen to be managed by an organization that is not accountable to industry.

**Ms Blakeman:** On the cumulative effects management it sounds to me like you've almost got a FITFIR that will be in place. The

first ones that get there, get their emissions to fit into the total amount allowed, but by the time you get to the 10th one, they won't be able to start because everybody else is taking up the allocation. Then how are you going to do this? Go back to the original nine and say, "If you guys cut your emissions, you can let in the 10th guy"? In the world of the free market I can't see that one happening. Do you just stop the development in a given area at the point where they reach, or do you start to move your target around?

**Mr. Renner:** Eventually there comes a point where you would have to stop development, but in the meantime you have an opportunity to co-ordinate the program. You have capital turnover. New technology becomes available. The later projects usually have much better, newer technology than the older projects. So you have to put in a plan that recognizes capital turnover . . .

**The Chair:** Hon. minister, sorry. I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 5, agreed to on February 23, 2011, the Committee of Supply shall now rise and report progress.

The chair would advise the officials to leave the Chamber so that we can continue on.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

**Dr. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration resolutions for the Department of Environment relating to the 2011-12 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Those in concurrence with the report, please say aye.

**Hon. Members:** Aye.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

It's now past 6 o'clock, so the chair shall now declare that this Assembly stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

We also have a field policy committee starting at 6:50 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:18 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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