

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, March 18, 1991**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 91/03/18

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

head: **Committee of Supply**

head: **Interim Supply Estimates 1991-92**

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please. In Committee of Supply this evening we're dealing with the interim supply pursuant to motions moved by the hon. the Provincial Treasurer earlier this day. Are there any questions, comments, or positions?

The hon. the Provincial Treasurer.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Chairman, it seems just like yesterday that we started this process of moving the budget through the Legislative Assembly, and I guess as the years click by, the time tends to collapse.

I wanted to just take a second today to outline a rather unique legislative process which we're experiencing today and this evening and this year in terms of moving the interim supply for the year ending March 31, '92. Members will recall that in other years we have had two other ways in which we've handled the interim supply. In those years where we had an election, we would probably move a large special warrant, and then when we came back into the House, we'd catch up either by budget or by additional interim supply or simply to confirm the special warrant. In still other years we would have the interim supply after the budget was introduced. But this year, because of the coincidence of time and the fact that we need the money to meet the demands of government, we are asking the Legislative Assembly for interim supply before we bring the budget down.

I think members will probably note that this is rather unique. In fact, as far as I know, it's the first time that I have been involved in it during the period that I've been in government, but I'm sure the records will show other times when we have done it somewhat similarly.

The point I'm making is that because it is an interesting approach to providing for interim supply and because there is some need to protect the heart of the real budget which will be out sometime in the next two to three weeks, we will have some difficulty perhaps in giving the full picture as to what the total budget may be. I make the point right now that in some cases you'll have to at least make some general judgment about whether or not the approximations are adequate, because you haven't got the detailed documents, the specific budget, to refer to to get the particular calculation.

I want to make it very clear that simply because we've selected \$4,422,804,546, that is not any magic number. The people in Treasury who made this recommendation to us made the best estimate that they had in terms of dollars required for the important funds that are being operated. The General Revenue Fund is going to require about \$4.242 billion, the Alberta capital fund \$119,730,000, and the Heritage Savings Trust Fund \$60,416,994. That, as I've said before in terms of budget discussions in this Assembly, will probably carry us through to someplace in late June, early July, remembering as well that the charge against government tends to be a touch higher in the early part of the year and tends to reduce through the summer and fall to pick up again in the last quarter of the year. The

point I'm making again is that you shouldn't read into these numbers any particular magic about the size of the budget expenditures. I would ask the members to be a little patient, because in due time and in due course we'll provide you with full details as to the total amount of the budget expenditures.

These dollars are necessary, Mr. Chairman. Again, when you deal with interim supply, I think all members are aware that if the Legislature does not provide these dollars, then of course the fundamental costs of government will not be paid. Certainly the wages of the large number of people in the Alberta civil service right across the province would obviously be parked. Transfers to Education, to Health, to school boards would have to be held, transfers to the advanced educational system as well, and the normal course of operation of the government would come to a standstill. Therefore, this process provides that on an interim basis the government can request approval to spend in this case \$4.422 billion to carry us through the first part of the fiscal year '91-92 and allow us to catch up with a formalized budget sometime through the completion of the process beginning April 1, '91.

So that's what's happening here, Mr. Chairman. Because all members are rather sophisticated and understand the process, I won't dwell much more on that. I would be willing, insofar as is possible, to deal with the notion of the expenditures, provide whatever additional information I can within the context of not providing full information about the budget, and to ask and call upon my colleagues, the various ministers who may be here, to answer other questions which may attend to the various expenditures, if necessary.

MR. McEACHERN: You're alone, Dick.

MR. JOHNSTON: It won't be the first time, Alex.

That's what we have, Mr. Chairman. We will ask the Legislature for that information. I would encourage all members to support the recommendation to move this through interim supply so we can provide the comfort and assurance to Albertans that this government will meet its commitments to pay the large number of bills that annually are committed to by the government and keep the fine level of services operating across this province in schools, education, and the general operations of government. Certainly these are the key areas in which this expenditure is requested.

Mr. Chairman, I will listen to the comments and, if possible, provide additional information where necessary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just before beginning my remarks, a bit of clarification. It's my understanding that we have three schedules in front of us: the General Revenue Fund, the Heritage Savings Trust Fund capital projects division, and the Alberta Capital Fund. I assume that it's appropriate at this time to make comments about any or all three of those schedules.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The first thing I want to say right off from the top is that I have to object most strenuously to the process we're engaged in here this evening. The Provincial Treasurer is asking us tonight to debate expenditures on the order of over \$4 billion from the

General Revenue Fund, over \$60 million from the Heritage Savings Trust Fund capital projects division, and close to \$120 million out of the Alberta Capital Fund. These documents were provided to the members of this Assembly sometime around 4:30 to 5 o'clock this afternoon. In essence, what is being given to us is a few moments of review. I think a few minutes to review these documents and then be prepared to debate them has to be objected to most strenuously.

Unfortunately, this is indicative of the general kind of contempt in which the government holds this Legislative Assembly and the taxpayers of this province. To present something well on the way to \$5 billion worth of expenditures, to give the most sketchy of information, lay it on us just moments and hours before it's to be debated is the height of contempt.

It's not the only way they display their contempt. I mean, for another example, we don't even have the public accounts yet for the year that began in April of 1989. It's almost April of 1991; we still don't have the public accounts for the year starting in April 1989. That's just part of the overall lack of concern, lack of interest, lack of respect this government has for the Legislative Assembly and for us in this place to do our work. I think it's quite shameful for the government to treat this Assembly in that way.

8:10

Furthermore, to present something to us without any overall direction for the government is also highly unusual. As I said earlier this afternoon, Mr. Chairman, had this government decided to call the Assembly back on, say, March 7, it would have given plenty of time for the Provincial Treasurer to come into this Assembly with his Budget Address and, following upon his Budget Address, lay out the overall government direction for the budget in the coming year and then lay the interim supply Bills onto the Assembly for their debate and consideration. That would have been the appropriate way in which to handle this, but this government chose not to call the Legislature earlier in March.

I could speculate why they didn't call us back earlier. I suppose maybe the golfing was too good in Palm Springs; I don't know. They certainly had it within their power to bring us back earlier in March so the process that ought to be followed could have been followed.

Now what we're being presented with is a blank cheque and the Provincial Treasurer saying: "Sign here. Don't ask any questions; don't read anything into it. The dollar amounts mean nothing. They're just going to get us over this little problem we've got, a problem of our own making in that we haven't called the Assembly back before now and we just have to get around to getting these estimates adopted so people can be paid." Well, I have no objection to interim supply Bills, and I have no objection to people in the service of Alberta being paid and for the work of government to carry on, but I do believe we are owed something better than information being dropped on us at the very last minute with the expectation for informed debate in this Assembly.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I guess I could say that it's only very, very marginally better than a situation where you have a cabinet passing something like a third of the provincial budget by order in council when 40 percent of the members of that cabinet weren't even elected. That was a situation we had two years ago, where all the interim supply was adopted by order in council and nearly half of the people doing the decision-making on that weren't even elected members of the Assembly. Maybe

we've progressed some small distance beyond that kind of situation, but not much. It's all part of a general disdain in which this Assembly is being held by the government of Alberta.

Just looking at the very peripheral, superficial documentation provided to us as members of the Assembly, there are certainly lots of questions that present themselves. I have a press release put out by the Minister of Municipal Affairs saying that the affairs of the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation terminated as of December 31, 1990. As far as I know, close to 200 people were laid off by this government, yet I see there's a request here under vote 8 of the Municipal Affairs department for close to \$33 million for the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Now, I don't know what one is to make of this. Why would we be voting money for a corporation whose affairs were ostensibly wound up by the government only three short months ago?

Then I notice that if we look to the capital projects division of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, all of a sudden we've got a new addition: the Alberta Family Life and Substance Abuse Foundation. I haven't seen any legislative approval being granted by this Assembly to establish in legislation such a foundation, yet here tonight we're being asked to fund it by \$2 million.

This comes at a time when we've been asking questions for a significant period of time, over the last couple of years, of the Premier and the Minister of Health and the chairman of AADAC, wanting to know what the relationship might be between this proposed foundation and the work of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. We have a request in the General Revenue Fund for \$14 million for AADAC and now another \$2 million for another foundation. What's the relationship between these two bodies? These are crucial questions that have previously been asked for clarification from the Premier and others.

The place for those answers to be clarified is in the legislation, where the minister would bring forward the appropriate legislation. We could have a look at it and see what that relationship is. We don't have that, Mr. Chairman, yet here we have tonight a request from the Provincial Treasurer to write a blank cheque to give him the authority to start spending \$2 million for the Alberta family life and substance abuse foundation with no information, no legislation in place, nothing on which we can base this request and examine and weigh its merits. It's just part of the general disdain for the process evidenced by this government.

Once upon a time the whole theory was that the government would change its fiscal year from the calendar year to the beginning of April 1 in order to allow a government, between the beginning of the calendar year and April, to bring its budget into the House of Commons or the Legislature and get the budget adopted so that it's in place for the new fiscal year. But it's been my experience that that hasn't happened in the province of Alberta for some long period of time. I stand to be corrected, but certainly not since this government has been in office. Yet it seems to me that some simple changes in scheduling the work of this Assembly could easily accommodate the process being followed whereby the general direction of government could be outlined in the form of the Budget Address, and the Assembly could then get on with its work.

This sort of backdoor approach to budgeting in my mind is just simply unacceptable. It doesn't provide any information to us in this Assembly. It doesn't provide any assistance to anyone in the public. It simply asks for a blank cheque without any supporting documentation, without any supporting plan. It's

simply a blank cheque without the proper support for that request.

So all the way around, Mr. Chairman, I'd rate this very, very poorly. I know the Provincial Treasurer. He could do better if he wanted to. I'm just disappointed that this government doesn't care enough about the finances of this province to do the process correctly and give it the respect due. If we want a reason why we've got a deficit in this province going on to \$12 billion, it stems from that lack of interest, that lack of concern, that lack of respect for due process of this Assembly, due regard for the finances of the province and the taxpayers' money that goes to support it. This government could do a much better job if they chose to. They're capable of it if they choose to. I'm deeply disappointed that they haven't chosen to.

8:20

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Interesting process that we're involved in here. Again, as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View said, totally inadequate. We're being asked to approve about 4 and a half billion dollars here with almost no explanation. We had the paper sort of thrown at us this afternoon, a few hours ago, very little explanation from the minister just now about why this process. Why didn't we call the House earlier? Do we have to wait until the end of the fiscal year to start the new fiscal year? We could be well into the budget by this time, the proper budget that should be before this Assembly. Asking us to approve about a third of the budget, and I assume that's approximately the amount, without any more information than we've been given is - well, I can just hear the government. They expect us to approve these with inadequate information; then when we get into the estimates and start saying, "What about this expenditure and what about that one?" they'll say: "You already approved a third of it. Why are you complaining now?"

It's like the way they treated the Daishowa thing or the way they've treated the whole public hearing process in the north on the development of the pulp mills: sort of go along step by step approving one step at a time. For instance, in Daishowa the government approved the clearing of the land and sort of said: "Well, if they want to build a plant, let them. We haven't given them any operating licence yet." Then when they got the plant built, they said, "Oh, well, we've got to give them a licence because they've built the plant."

It's this same kind of thinking you're expecting us to do here. You give us no information. You ask us to approve a third of the budget. When you bring in the real budget and we start questioning some of the things in it, you'll tell us: "Well, you've already approved a third of it; you've got to give the rest of it now. I mean, we can't cut that program, because we're a third of the way through it. You've already approved that expenditure, so why not approve the other two-thirds?"

If we had some information to go on in some of these specific cases, a little more detail, and could debate the Bill or have some confidence in the minister or the government, if we believed in their programs and that they were all necessary and were the kinds of things we should agree to and support, then, fine, that would be a good process. But I think it's a rather unfair process, and I don't really see why we should be expected to engage in this kind of budgeting.

As to the minister saying that it seems like a very short time ago that he brought in his last budget, I'd like to remind him of one of the problems with his last budget. He claimed that he'd

only have a billion dollar deficit in the numbers he brought forward. He did the same thing there that he's going to do in this next balanced budget he's going to bring in: he just did a little doctoring of the books to make it look the way he wanted it to look. It's rather passing strange, it seems to me, that we've gone through almost the whole fiscal year that we're now in and he hasn't given us any updates, not once. In spite of all the extra oil moneys that he very obviously got from the Gulf war, he still hasn't found any reason why he should tell us what's in that 1989-90 budget and how we're making out with it, how close we're going to be.

Of course, the truth of the matter is that when he brought in Bill 21 last year asking for \$2 billion more in borrowing power, that was nearer the mark as to what his deficit was going to be for the year we're presently in. That's why he hasn't wanted to tell anybody the bad news. Maybe that's why we don't have any public accounts even for the year before. I don't know. The minister doesn't seem to like to give us bad news. He waits until there's something else to divert everybody's attention, like a new budget, before he gives us the information about the year we're in or even the year before. It's an incredible process that the minister goes through. The timing and the process that he expects the people of Alberta to put up with are totally inadequate, Mr. Chairman.

One of the reasons we'd like to have a look at things like the public accounts is because we'd like to know what's happening with Softco. I phoned over to his office the other day and asked for the reports for '89 and '90. We did have some '89 ones, but I wanted another copy. I haven't seen even that. Why don't we have the '90 Softco report? Why don't we have the information on Alberta Intermodal Services? His colleague the Minister of Economic Development and Trade was prepared to stand up in the House and berate myself and our researchers for not having the updated information. In fact, our researcher had asked and asked and asked for the information, and the minister kept refusing to give it. It should have been out in the public accounts two or three months ago, and we are still waiting for it.

If he isn't going to give us the public accounts some time so we can see what's happened even last year, if he's not going to give us an update on this year, why should we be approving next year's expenditures? I mean, what the minister is onto here is a very good thing. He gives you a budget that's nothing more than a political statement trying to make everything look good, full of roses and perfume saying what a wonderful job they're doing with the economy and how everything is so great. A year later when he brings out the new budget, he admits to half of the untruths or incorrect statements in that budget forecast, and then he takes another year before he puts out the public accounts to tell us what really happened. That's a nice scam he's onto quite frankly, and this process is part of that same runaround that he likes to give the taxpayers of Alberta and the opposition. So, Mr. Chairman, we've had totally inadequate explanations.

I have some specific questions from some parts of the budget, and maybe the minister could at least bring himself to answer some of the specific things. I mean, we are being expected to approve 4 and a half billion dollars in expenditures here. For instance, looking through the Energy section, there was just one thing that struck me. I see that the government is asking for \$300,000 for Public Utilities Regulation. It just reminded me that the chairman of the Public Utilities Board at the 75th celebration last fall let the cat out of the bag that this government had made the decision to sell AGT in 1988. He said, "But

you know how political parties and governments are; they're kind of slow getting around to doing what they intend to do." Yet I recall very clearly this government and the Premier particularly going around Alberta during the election of '89 saying that they weren't going to sell AGT. So what's the gist? What's going on here? Of course, the excuse they finally used, because they didn't have the courage to say it during an election, was that the Supreme Court ruled on the fact that the federal government would be regulating telecommunications from now on in this country. The government said, "Oh, well, I guess if that's the case, then we may as well abandon Albertans and sell off AGT."

Now, in terms of selling off AGT, I have some complaints. I'll come back to this document in a few minutes with a couple of other specific questions, but while I'm on AGT, I want to go to the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund. If you look at page 2, the last item is \$3 million for Individual Line Service under the Technology, Research and Telecommunications department's control, but the money could come out of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund. Now, I wonder, and perhaps the Treasurer can explain since the minister isn't here to explain, why the taxpayers of this province should be using heritage trust fund money to continue to build individual line service to rural Albertans when they've handed the company over to individual shareholders whose only interest from now on will be making a profit out of the company?

Why is it that this government expects taxpayers to go on funding something that's going to enhance the value of a corporation that has been handed over to investors who are supposed to be great private entrepreneurs out taking a risk in the market? Right? What kind of risk is it when we go ahead and build the line for them out of taxpayers' dollars? What kind of risk is it when as soon as it looks like NovAtel, which is one of the companies that the shareholders supposedly bought, is in a little bit of trouble, the government says, "Well, we'll buy it back again." So we put the taxpayers on the hook for \$175 million plus another \$525 million in sales guarantees and capital expenditures and money for operating losses and a number of catchall sort of categories that make up the \$525 million line of credit.

Although we thought we had the bottom line on December 31 in that the cost of purchasing the company was going to be \$160 million plus about \$15 million for some management fees, we find out now that that wasn't the whole picture, that somehow we're going to have to fork out another \$200 million or so. Well, why should the taxpayers be guaranteeing the profits of shareholders in Telus?

8:30

Mr. Chairman, it doesn't make any sense, and I don't see why we should approve another \$3 million for the individual line service for rural Albertans unless the government of Alberta in the name of all the people of Alberta owns that company. We do, I know, still own 44 percent, but the government is saying: "Oh, well, that doesn't matter. We own 44 percent and nobody else owns more than five, but we're washing our hands of this company. We're leaving it as a private company." They put all their friends in charge, and they're going to let them run it anyway without any regard for what happens to the monthly rates for residential Albertans, for small business Albertans, for rural Albertans. They've abandoned all of that and said, "We're just turning it over to this company to make a profit out of it, and then we're making darn sure that the taxpayers take all the losses so that the shareholders do make a profit out of it." I

don't see any reason why we should throw another \$3 million down the drain.

There were a couple of other points here in the general budget part that I wanted to ask about. On page 6 under Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, section 3, Forest Resources Management, the government is asking for \$37 million. One assumes that that's approximately a third of what that section will be asking in the real budget itself. I'm wondering why that section of the department needs so much money when they've handed over most of the forestry resources of this province in FMAs to huge multinational corporations.

I mean, this government has made it very clear that they don't intend to put enough people in place to manage the forests of this province, that they don't want to hire the people with the expertise, and that they don't want to keep control of what happens in Alberta's forests. So they've just turned over huge chunks, like the size of New Brunswick, to Al-Pac and another one nearly the same size to Daishowa. These 20-year lease FMAs turn those companies into owners of huge chunks of Alberta to the point where those companies can now charge other companies, like oil companies, that want to come in onto that land incredible amounts of money, and the management company gets paid instead of the Alberta taxpayers, instead of the government collecting that money on behalf of the taxpayers for any work that the oil companies want to do on those lands. So I don't see why we should approve \$37 million for handing over our forest resources to big companies under FMAs.

In the health care department, for example, again we're being asked for an incredible amount of money. I didn't total it, but you can see that section 3, Financial Assistance for Acute Care, is \$825 million, nearly \$200 million in number 2 for Health Care Insurance, another \$188 million. There's over a billion dollars in health care estimates, which I guess is only approximately a third of the costs that we're going to be asked to spend. These categories are not broken down and not explained fully enough to see what portion is going into long-term care, home care, acute care. I see that a lot of it's going into acute care, of course. This government tends to build a lot of buildings and then not want to put out the money to operate programs in those buildings. So why should we approve something that we only know half of the information about? Why shouldn't the Minister of Health be here to give us some details about what's going on and what direction they're moving at least? But, no, just some numbers, and here it is, and two hours later we're expected to approve it.

I mentioned some of the incredible costs that are now associated with NovAtel in the AGT sale. You know, we spent \$100 million selling AGT in a fire sale. In these estimates on page 9 under Technology, Research and Telecommunications I don't see anything that makes any provision for the kind of losses that must be anticipated for NovAtel. I mean, we know we spent the \$175 million to buy it, and we know now that we lost a couple of hundred million before the end of December. There are three months - January, February, and March - of this year on the fiscal year that we're presently in which wouldn't show up here I agree, but I would be just totally amazed if the Alberta government has managed to turn that company around so totally that the Treasurer does not anticipate any further losses in the new fiscal year, which we're planning for and talking about here.

So why is it that Technology, Research and Telecommunications has nothing in there as far as I can see - I mean, there's only a total of \$25 million on those four points and only \$13

million in the first two, which are the only ones that might possibly have a little bit of money for NovAtel if there's a problem there. I can't understand why a prudent government wouldn't at least put some figures in there to try to cover some of the losses that are almost bound to follow at the rate that NovAtel is presently costing the taxpayers such a bundle in this province.

So on the final point, then, Mr. Chairman, I don't see why the minister should hand out a 2 and a half billion dollar bill to the taxpayers of this province at 4:30 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon and then a few hours later expect us to have perused the document carefully enough to have had questions and answers with the ministers – I might say: what ministers? Half of them aren't here – about some of the individual things that are there. Why shouldn't each minister have stood up and explained a little bit about the direction of their department and given us some sense of what's happening and what's going on with this document: why it's here and why they need that money? Then we could have asked a few more questions and come to some kind of conclusion about what whether we want to support this or not. He's just asking for a blank cheque, and quite frankly on his record – I mean, he's never been right on the deficit since he was the Treasurer. He's never been right on the expenditures. He's always had to go back to the well with big supplementary requisitions and orders in council. He's never been right on the revenues. Why would anybody in the province believe that these numbers are meaningful, that they are needed, that the people of Alberta should approve them, and that they point and show the direction that the government intends to go with the budget?

You know, the budget has very little information in it, but this has even less. For the Leg. Assembly we've got four votes. For the Department of Advanced Education we've got three votes, three categories: Departmental Support Services, Assistance to Higher and Further Educational Institutions, and Financial Assistance to Students. There's over \$300 million there, and we're supposed to pass them with no further knowledge, no input from the minister, nobody telling us anything about what sense of direction the government has, why it needs this money now, and so on, and no excuse for being so lazy and bringing them in so late. We should have had the House sitting in February, and we should have had the budget pretty well passed by now. Then we would be in a position to know whether the interim supply was needed or not or how much was needed to get us through to the end of the session.

So I for one don't feel like approving these estimates, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

8:40

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's hardly a financial pleasure for Albertans to see this House going through this exercise once again. The process is spectacularly contemptuous of the democratic process, reflecting the growing disorganization and confusion of an already terminally confused and sclerotic government.

What a process. Here we are without public accounts for the year going back to March 31 of 1990. They're probably lost in the mess in the Provincial Treasurer's office. His staff is probably searching for them now. Without these public accounts we find ourselves being given six hours to be presented with motions to approve interim supply in respect of which we're given negligible information, in respect of which the Provincial

Treasurer has indicated that he himself intends to try and field and no doubt answer questions on almost every portfolio within the government, then to be faced with a limitation on debate, one evening with respect to this committee on supply, probably four hours if that, \$1,058,000,000 an hour. But what's a billion dollars, eh, Dick? It shows the need for major reform in the way in which this House operates, and the biggest reform needed is to rush these guys out of office as soon as possible.

Now, Mr. Chairman, this is a proposal for interim supply, and of course, as I have already noted, it provides far less than the real picture needed to divine the government's fiscal intentions for this province for the next year. However, I would like to make some general comments with respect to the fiscal situation of this province. All Albertans are of course concerned with respect to the spectacular fiscal mismanagement of this province, the mismanagement that I would place into three categories. The first relates to the huge deficits and the accumulated debt to which the taxpayers of this province have been subjected during the tenure of this Provincial Treasurer. We have, according to Moody's rating service, an accumulated current debt of \$14 billion topped off by \$9 billion of unfunded pension liability.

Part of this, Mr. Chairman, reflecting the second concern, is due to spectacular waste, mismanagement, and low-priority expenditures on the part of this government, not the least of which are the business giveaways to friends of the government, such as the Pocklington's, the Alberta-Pacifics, the series of meat packing plants: Centennial and others.

There is, of course, a range of expenditures about which we have expressed concern during the course of the past several years. I note the community facilities enhancement program, some expenditures of which have been sensible and reasonable, but far too many have been pushed by a pot of money looking to be spent by government MLAs traveling around the province with their special lottery briefcases filled with application forms for projects such as golf courses at a time when students can't get into our universities and people are lined up to get in for heart operations. What about the mortgage shielding program? Why should every taxpayer in this province pay to shield the mortgages of not just low-income Albertans but many well-to-do Albertans? These are just some of the examples of expenditures which should not have been made.

The third concern we have with respect to the budget process, of course, is the secrecy and creative accounting which is a great feature of this Provincial Treasurer's tenure. There's an inability of this opposition and Albertans to get copies of agreements relating to the \$2 billion to \$3 billion of loans and guarantees which Alberta taxpayers have at risk. This is a formula for disaster for this province: the trick accounting; no recognition of the pension liability other than an obscure footnote; the creation of the Capital Fund, which is unique in this country; the inclusion of phantom income items such as the federal stabilization payments before they're receivable, which is reminiscent of the recently reported inclusion of income in the accounts of NovAtel which had to be reversed by the new auditors. The understatement of expenditures and the use of special warrants as well should not be overlooked, Mr. Chairman: \$598 million this year, \$1.5 billion over the last six years, and still climbing. It is clear that there is a need for accurate information in order to make good financial decisions. We believe that is one of the reasons why this province has been having such financial problems over the past five years.

At the same time as we see this waste and spending on low priorities to the extent of many hundreds of millions of dollars,

Mr. Chairman, we're going through an era of crisis in education, long delays in obtaining medical treatment, a legal system in chaos, inadequate mental health services, strained immigration settlement services, and inattention to the problems of low-income Albertans, who have paid through the nose through the regressive tax-raising measures of the Treasurer.

Now, the Treasurer has invited questions with respect to some of his proposed expenditures, and I'm going to take him at his word, although time will only permit me to deal with a few of the many questions which we have. Firstly, Mr. Chairman, in the realm of Advanced Education it is quite clear that many Alberta students are now finding themselves shut out of our colleges and universities. The institutions have decaying buildings and capital assets. I'd like to ask the Provincial Treasurer how these expenditures are going to be addressing those particular problems.

Moving on to the Attorney General expenditures, we are going through an era in which the courts are in crisis. There are long delays, shortages of judges and courtrooms, overworked prosecutors, inadequate preparation time for them, and a legal aid system subject to the threat of a lawyers' strike, although this has apparently been resolved. I'm wondering what measures the Provincial Treasurer's government has to deal with this critical decline in one of the important elements of public service in this province.

In Career Development and Employment cuts have been announced with respect to summer employment for students. We're now in a situation, Mr. Chairman, where over 100,000 Albertans are without jobs. The government crows about this as if this were a fine record. What is the government going to be doing about this tragic unemployment situation? What is the government going to be doing about the growing settlement and language problems of the immigrants who are coming to this province?

Culture and Multiculturalism. We have seen over the last few years a rise in the forces of racism and intolerance. It's quite clear, Mr. Chairman, that there is a need for greater focus on understanding and acceptance amongst our peoples. What is being done in the realm of the Culture and Multiculturalism department to combat the growing tide of racism in this province?

8:50

Economic Development and Trade. The concern here, of course, Mr. Chairman, is the profligate waste of hundreds of millions of dollars in giveaways shrouded by secrecy to friends of the government. Albertans are unable to get a copy of a single one of the agreements relating to the \$2 billion to \$3 billion of loans and guarantees which their funds are backing. We have the loans and the giveaways to Peter Pocklington, the giveaways and loans to Alberta-Pacific and the friends of the government. We have the meat packing plants. We have the Norstar fiasco in Calgary. We have the public propping-up of virtually every energy megaproject, all the forestry projects, and all the technology businesses in this province. Many of them have gone sour at great expense to the people of this province. Are we going to continue with that? Do these interim expenditures continue along that same sorry line, the same sad precedent this government has established over the past five years?

In education we find growing problems in our elementary and secondary schools. Rather than declining numbers of students per class, we now find that the trend is towards more students per teacher. Schools are being asked to handle an increasing range of health and social service problems which are going

unacknowledged by the government. What is the government going to do with respect to the serious crisis in that area?

In terms of Executive Council we note a continuation of the heavy spending of the ministry of propaganda, otherwise known as the Public Affairs Bureau: \$3,663,000 to be expended just on an interim basis. Is this waste going to continue, Mr. Chairman?

The Department of Health. We hear continuing complaints of long lists of Albertans waiting to be treated for heart ailments, for eye operations. We have rural hospitals sitting unused or with heavy-duty technological equipment unused because of the shortage of medical personnel to operate them. There's clearly a need to rationalize this system.

AN HON. MEMBER: Where?

MR. CHUMIR: All over. I'll provide you with a long list.

AN HON. MEMBER: Name them.

MR. CHUMIR: I will.

There's a need to rationalize this system, Mr. Chairman. What about the Northern Alberta Children's hospital? It's understood that a million dollars is being allocated for this although there's been no approval of that hospital by this government and by this Legislature, and there's growing concern across the province with respect to the continued building of infrastructure while services decline. Is that included? Is there money for this being included in the interim supply that we're being asked to approve?

Mental health services, as I mentioned earlier, are inadequate. What provision is being made to treat mental patients in our communities who have been pushed out of institutions with a move towards deinstitutionalization, in many senses a good policy but a good policy only in the event that community facilities are made available. These facilities have not been made available, and there's a desperate need for them. What are we going to be doing with respect to those?

The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission is getting \$14,112,000 under the Department of Health expenditures. I hear continuing concern expressed about the significant sums of taxpayers' money being spent to send drug patients and women suffering from bulimia and anorexia to expensive hospital programs in the United States. Why don't we have these programs here? Why are we spending a fortune to send patients away from their homes to these programs, people in desperate need of programming? What are we going to do about that?

The Department of Labour. I've been involved, Mr. Chairman, with a very sad instance relating to the Norstar helmet manufacturing company and its successors in respect of which low-income immigrant labourers have been waiting for up to two years and more for payment of wages. The amount owing is in the range of \$200,000 at this particular time. The labour standards branch has been doing its best to attempt to deal with this matter, but it doesn't have the finances or the legal weapons to be able to deal with a very tragic situation. I'm wondering whether the Treasurer or another minister can tell us what his government plans to do about this problem that's so long neglected, notwithstanding the fact that it announced two and a half years ago that it was launching a review of the matter by its immigration advisory panel, which has reported long ago but whose report is being kept confidential, as is the usual manner of this government, which advertises that it provides information by the barrelful. Well, it provides baloney by the barrelful but not information.

Recreation and Parks. Mr. Chairman, I note here \$3,654,000 for Kananaskis Country Management. I'm wondering when the government is going to end its secrecy with respect to the deal it has made relating to the Kananaskis golf course. Basic information has been denied the taxpayers by this government, information with respect to the cost of the golf course: income, expenses. Documents have been denied. There's tremendous concern out there amongst taxpayers. This has caught the imagination of the public because they identify. They like their golf, but they also want to see a fair deal for Albertans. This deal is not a fair deal for Albertans. A great deal of money is being made by the operators of this golf course in respect of a huge investment by this province, and we need to get a sharper pencil. I want to know what this government is going to be doing about that.

MR. JOHNSTON: The only thing that's unfair is your tie, Sheldon.

MR. CHUMIR: You like it? Want it?

Technology, Research and Telecommunications. Well, what more can one say in a week in which the government has announced a loss in excess of \$200 million in respect of NovAtel. This, of course, is another problem in a long catalogue of failures: Myrias and General Systems Research. Are we going to be continuing with these types of mistakes? Are we being asked to provide more money for these types of fiascos in this interim supply?

Tourism. Here's a classic. If one follows the Canada/Alberta tourism agreement, millions and millions and millions of taxpayers' dollars are being given to hotels for renovation and expansion, money that should have been paid by the owners of these facilities. What happened to free enterprise? Why is it that the taxpayers of Alberta are being asked to fund these kinds of operations, the expense of which should be borne by the private-sector businesspeople themselves. Is there more money for that in these estimates? Are we being asked to approve more giveaways in this interim supply, Mr. Chairman?

Transportation and Utilities. I'm sure we're all curious to know to what extent further money is going towards the paving of all of the secondary roads in this province. Lord knows that a lot of those roads need to be paved and there is some justification for some of it, but a crash program at a time when this province is suffering from the budget deficits and the high accumulated debt that we have? No, not the way to go, Mr. Chairman, and I'm wondering just to what extent we are moving in this direction in respect of this particular budget.

9:00

Finally, the Treasury. I could speak all evening on the problems within the department of the Treasury, Mr. Chairman, but let me simply deal with the issue of the unfunded pension liability, because we've been asking about this for some period of time, and I'm wondering whether the minister finally has any plans to deal with this problem. Not only does he have any plans; has he started to deal with it? Is there anything in this interim supply which moves us towards spending some money to start reducing that liability, as we should and have to be doing?

Well, those are only a few of the questions I have, Mr. Chairman, and I'll now cede the floor to the next speaker or, failing that, to the Provincial Treasurer for some tap dancing.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Vegreville.

MR. FOX: Oh, pardon me, Mr. Chairman. I thought the Treasurer would have been moved to respond to some of the many questions and allegations raised by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but apparently the Treasurer has no defence.

I share the concerns articulated by my colleagues the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and the Member for Edmonton-Kingsway about the process here, about what we're involved in: having these three flimsy little documents – documents, I might add, that make the Speech from the Throne look like, you know, a substantial treatise – that recommend to the House the expenditure of almost 4 and a half billion dollars with no background information, almost no cabinet ministers here to defend the estimates presented for their departments. I gather the government figures that they're going to have . . .

MR. DINNING: Ask.

MR. FOX: Just be patient, Minister of Education; just be patient.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please.

MR. FOX: Anyway, we're being asked to approve expenditures without having the opportunity to ask all of the ministers to account for the proposals they're putting before us and to defend them. If we have a shoddy process for reviewing and approving our budget every year, this makes a mockery of even that, Mr. Chairman, because the one thing that is most obvious to members in this Assembly is that we do not have very much time at all to do a thorough analysis of the spending and revenue-generating plans of this government. We've talked about that on other occasions, so I won't belabour the fact, but I do have some specific questions and issues that I want to raise in terms of some of the departments' estimates here.

The Provincial Treasurer has not told us anything in terms of the time lines for these. This is interim expenditures for the 12 months ending March 31, 1992, but he hasn't indicated to us which of the votes and which departments are the full annual allotment or allocation for the given departments and which are sort of stub budgets, if you will, to carry us through to sometime in June or July when the appropriation has been completed in the more formal sense. He hasn't given us that information. It's difficult for us to know what to make of these figures he's provided us.

The specific questions that I have to ask are to the Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism about the amounts included in the four votes under his department: Departmental Support Services, Cultural Development, Historical Resources Development, and Multiculturalism Development. I'd like to know from the minister if there are amounts in either of those four budgets that will fund the establishment of the Northern Lights regional library system and pay for the construction of a new headquarters when the new location is determined. I'll tell you why that is an important subject for me and the people I represent, Mr. Chairman, and the people of northeastern Alberta.

As you will well remember, Mr. Chairman, the Northern Lights regional library system reached that magic moment in December 1989 when, after hundreds and hundreds of hours of volunteer labour had been put in to try and sell the benefits of a regional library system to people in northeastern Alberta, when a number of communities had made commitments to join the system, support the system not only in kind but with tax dollars, we reached that magic 50 percent figure. The Northern Lights library system was to become a reality. What they did then was

do their best to determine which of the participating communities would be the best location to site the headquarters in. It was decided through independent process, not once but twice, that Vegreville was indeed the best location, all things considered, for the site headquarters.

MR. FISCHER: It was in the wrong place.

MR. FOX: Now, we hear the Member for Wainwright confirm exactly what I'm going to tell the Chairman, exactly what I'm going to tell the people of Alberta. He says, "It was in the wrong place." Well, it wasn't in the wrong place according to the consultants who analyzed things like distance and facility, life-style opportunities for people who would be attracted there. He's saying it's in the wrong place because it's in a riding represented by a New Democrat. The Member for Redwater-Andrew is nodding his head as well.

So I think the Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism has some things to answer for, Mr. Chairman. I'd like him to do it in the context of debate on these budget estimates. The fact is that Vegreville was chosen as the headquarters; then lo and behold when the minister had the chance to acknowledge the hard work, the earnest effort of the volunteers of northeastern Alberta and to give the people of that region the regional library system that they so richly deserved, he said, "Sorry, folks; we don't have the money."

He said at the time that that had nothing whatever to do with the location of the headquarters. Now, I'm a trusting person, and I believe the Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism. Indeed, I had to defend the hon. minister on many occasions. I was extremely disappointed that a government that can find hundreds of millions of dollars to waste and squander and buy off their corporate friends couldn't find the mere pittance required to fund this important regional library system, but I accepted him at his word that he wasn't able to find that money, didn't lobby successfully enough with the Provincial Treasurer, and was more committed to maintaining existing services than initiating new ones. I took him at his word.

In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, a very insidious process developed and not the normal lobbying process where you'd see MLAs lobbying for their constituency: "I think you should put it here because we're the best constituency, we're the prettiest constituency, we've got the most to offer." That kind of lobbying had passed because the decision had been made where to site the headquarters. It wasn't even the insidious kind of lobbying that I've seen from this government and their supporters over the five years I've been MLA where they try and blackmail people into supporting them by saying: "If you don't vote for a government member, you won't get anything in your riding. If you want to get anything done in your constituency, you've got to vote for a Conservative candidate." That kind of insidious nonsense is something they've been laying on the people of Alberta ever since I've been involved in politics. What we had was a third level of lobbying that I find bitterly offensive, Mr. Chairman. We had MLAs going out and threatening board members in the northeastern part of Alberta that if they did not rescind their decision to locate the library headquarters in Vegreville, then they would not get government funding. I find that really unacceptable.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to quote from the *St. Paul Journal*, Tuesday, March 5. I'll supply this to *Hansard*. The headline:

"Vegreville dumped. St. Paul back in running for Northern Lights Library System." It says:

St. Paul is back in the running for the permanent location of the Northern Lights Library System headquarters.

Coun. Dave Lashak reported to town council last week that Northeastern communities have been invited once again . . . This makes the third time, Mr. Chairman.

. . . to submit applications for the facility which was previously awarded to Vegreville.

The invitation comes after a meeting in Elk Point Feb. 23 where the Northern Lights Regional [library] Board rescinded last year's decision to give Vegreville the facility.

Lashak, who represented St. Paul, was one of nine board members to vote in favour of dropping Vegreville as headquarters. The vote was an attempt to secure promised government funding which never appeared after Vegreville was chosen as the headquarters . . .

According to Lashak, some board members were under the impression the library project would get funding from the provincial budget this March if the headquarters was situated somewhere else.

I mean, I wonder where they got that perception. Was it because of the Member for Lloydminster, who's admitted in other sources that he indeed lobbied after the fact? Was it the Member for Redwater-Andrew, who suggested they put the headquarters in Andrew even though they're not a member of the Northern Lights library system? Maybe it was the Minister of Agriculture from Bonnyville, who did the same kind of lobbying.

9:10

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. Order. I would draw the hon. member's attention to 23(i) of Standing Orders and would ask him to pay close attention to that in any further remarks he's making.

MR. FOX: Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I have not, in my view, attributed false or unavowed motives. I've merely repeated what the hon. members themselves have said in local newspapers, what they've admitted to, and what the local board members said they were subjected to in terms of the insidious kind of after-the-fact lobbying which I think amounts to nothing more than a form of political blackmail by MLAs in northeastern Alberta. I'd like to put on the record that it didn't have to be this way.

**Point of Order
Parliamentary Language**

MR. DAY: Point of order.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. Point of order, Red Deer-North.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The member opposite not only refused to listen to your first admonition, but he's gone further. I'd cite 23(j): using "abusive and insulting language." I think these remarks, words like "blackmail" and "threaten," are really going a little too far. We would look for a retraction of those ridiculous statements.

MR. FOX: On the point of order, Mr. Chairman, if I might, *Beauchesne*, section 69:

The Speaker has reminded the House, "It is very important . . . to indicate that something can be inflammatory, can be disagreeable, can even be offensive, but it may not be a question of

privilege unless the comment actually impinges upon the ability of Members of Parliament to do their job properly."

Anyway, I'll move on, Mr. Chairman, if I might.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just a moment, please. I would draw all members' attention, and since the Member for Vegreville currently has the floor, I would remind you once again, though, of section 23, and particularly (i) and also related to this (h), and ask you to be apprised of those as you continue your remarks.

MR. FOX: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the counsel. I feel very strongly about the issue, and that's why I felt moved to express them in those terms, but I appreciate your guidance.

Debate Continued

MR. FOX: I'd like to say that it needn't have been this way, that I by telephone conversation advised the Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism that there was this kind of behind-the-scenes lobbying going on in northeastern Alberta, and I admitted that it may well have been nothing more than an attempt by local board members to take advantage of the bad reputation of this government, to take advantage of the public perception that these guys do in fact make their funding decisions based on who represents which riding, that they could use that perception as an opportunity to rescind the decision, thereby making their community eligible once again for consideration the third time round.

I said to the minister, "Now, accepting, as I do, with good faith your intentions and your commitment that the location of the systems headquarters has nothing whatever to do with the funding for the system, would you be willing to go out and protect the reputation of you as the minister and this Conservative government by quashing those rumours, making it very clear to the people of northeastern Alberta that your funding decision has nothing to do whatever with the location?"

MR. MAIN: Funding has nothing to do with location.

MR. FOX: You could have said it on the record. You could have said it loud and clear so the board members could have heard you before they met on February 23.

I advised the minister of what was likely to happen, and I regret very much that he didn't take advantage of the opportunity to defend his and the government's reputation. He could also have announced that the funding for the systems headquarters was in place and was coming and that the board members needn't trouble themselves with all of this kind of lobbying and decision rescinding, but again the minister chose not to, so I do lay the blame at the feet of the person responsible for funding decisions in the Department of Culture and Multiculturalism. He allowed some of his colleagues to do some lobbying that may be determined as unacceptable, and the board changed their decision. I regret it very much, Mr. Chairman, because it doesn't speak well for the democratic process, it doesn't speak well for encouraging Albertans to make the decisions that they want to make at election time without having to be fearful of retribution or punishment or intimidation, and it really does not speak well for the process.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism: does any of the money that he's asking for by way of this interim supply, votes 1, 2, 3, or 4, include funding for the establishment of the Northern Lights regional library system? Yes or no?

MS BARRETT: Mr. Chairman, I would not have got to my feet, but I see that the Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism made no attempt to reply to the Member for Vegreville, so I'm assuming that he has no answer or that he is as determinedly reticent as is every other member of cabinet when it comes to being put on the spot when it comes to questions that they don't want to answer.

I'd actually like to go through this budget, Mr. Chairman, because I don't think there's a lot of explanation in here at all. I think I'll start, if the Treasurer doesn't mind, with the trust fund, capital projects division. I see that \$2 million is being asked to be set aside for the Alberta family life and substance abuse foundation. I was at the 96th Street Festival community resource fair today, and I saw a number of agencies. Most of them are inner city agencies. Most of them receive some funding from the province. Most of them are actively involved in outreach programs and counseling programs and, in fact, alcohol and drug abuse programs, and I didn't see this foundation. Now, I saw all sorts of agencies that get no funding from the government. I saw the Salvation Army and Alcoholics Anonymous over there, but I didn't see this foundation.

What I want to know is this: how come we're spending money on a foundation that's supposed to be talking about family life and substance abuse and they're not even at this very important resource fair? In fact, I've never seen them anywhere. I'm starting to wonder if a lot of the money is really just being channeled to the board that governs it. This is not uncommon, my friend. I have seen a number of boards and agencies and tribunals that eat up most of the funds that are given to them just by, you know, having their meetings and sometimes flying around the province or the country, and they don't actually get out there and do anything. So (a) I don't know the proportion of the overall budget that this \$2 million constitutes for the foundation, (b) I don't know what they're doing, and (c) I don't know how they're spending this kind of money. I don't think I'm in a position to approve this section of the budget. Do you? I don't.

I'll just go on to some other sections of this interim budget that I don't think any of us have sufficient information to judge.

Ah, yes. Under the Attorney General's department: Support for Legal Aid. This one makes me really curious. The allocation asked is \$11.7 million. I for one am a real advocate of legal aid. I represent a lot people who don't have two nickels to rub together, and, by God, they have to go to legal aid. Sometimes they have to go to legal aid for civil cases, and when legal aid is able to help them, what they do is send the bill out to the people afterwards. You can't blame them, because, you know, lawyers can only be asked to give out so many cases for free and they can only charge so many to the legal aid program.

The legal aid program has been under a funding problem for the last few years. Now, what I see, Mr. Chairman, and I have no objection to this, is some companies like Milner & Steer getting bigger and now merging with the other big western Canada company, Fenerty. We've now got Milner Fenerty, the largest legal firm in western Canada. I see them making big mergers and probably gathering expertise to the point where they could practically monopolize any field that they wanted to - not that they will do so. But I also see a lot of lawyers who are in small practices who happily give of their time not only to do legal aid cases but to do pro bono cases. This has been a problem. You see, the large firms can often absorb more of the legal aid and pro bono than the small firms, but it tends to

be the small firms that give a greater proportion of their time to legal aid and pro bono than the large.

Now, when it comes to ordinary people, especially the working poor, we're talking about people who – I don't know; they might get sued over something for which they are not guilty. You know what civil action costs? It costs a lot of moola. Well, they can't go to legal aid, and if they do, like I say, they get a bill. Now, whether or not they can pay it is often irrelevant to the lawyer that's doing the bill and often irrelevant to legal aid but not always. More importantly, it is never irrelevant to the recipient of the bill. They feel the weight of that bill whether they can pay it or not. I'm talking about civil cases. In criminal cases the weight is in fact sometimes more onerous. So then I've got to wonder. I see the lawyers in Alberta saying, "You know, if you don't raise our fees, if you don't pay us at least 40 or 50 percent of what we're currently able to bill outside of the legal aid system, why do you expect us to carry on?" We're not talking about even billing in proportion to their overhead. Really they take it at a loss. Legal aid cases are taken at a loss to the company. Okay? That's the fact.

9:20

Now, in front of me there is a request to agree to \$11.7 million for an interim budget. What portion of the budget will this constitute? Does this constitute an increase in the payments through the legal aid system? If it doesn't, I don't think I can approve it. I don't think I can vote yes. I mean, I'm not asking for rich people to get richer; I am asking for the system to work on behalf of the poor. That's the more important case here. I can guarantee you that the rich will not get richer on the legal aid system. So if the Treasurer knows the answer to this question, I'd like to hear it. I want to know what proportion of the budget this \$11.7 million constitutes and whether or not it also constitutes an increase in the overall funding that is going to be given over to legal aid.

Under Career Development and Employment I see \$13.6 million being asked for Employment and Immigration Services. Well, I want to know if that includes a cost of living increase to the immigration services that currently operate in Edmonton which are funded by the government. I know there are similar agencies in Calgary and other centres in Alberta. For the last three years by and large their budgets have been frozen. I'm not stupid, Mr. Chairman. I know that the ministers' department budgets weren't frozen last year. I can tell you that some went up by 30 percent. So I see ministers saying, "Protect me from inflation," but they won't say that to the agencies they fund. Yet everybody knows that independent agencies providing certain types of social services can provide those services in a much more cost efficient fashion than can a large bureaucracy. Nobody argues. So then you've got to ask yourself, "Well, why do they punish these guys year after year by not even giving them funding that's going to meet the rate of inflation?" Then the Treasurer comes and he says, "Can you approve \$13.6 million for Employment and Immigration Services?" not even telling me if that includes an increase to at least meet the rate of inflation for the agencies that this department sponsors. I want to know.

I also want to know if this reflects a cut or an increase in the programming being sponsored by that department, because my recollection is this, Mr. Chairman. My recollection is that the priority employment program got cut last year and the summer temporary employment program got cut this year. So what's the net amount here? Are we looking at a whole bunch of money going into a bureaucracy and not into the programs for which the department was established?

Culture and Multiculturalism. I want to come back to this one too. Mr. Chairman, I saw a clip of Premier Getty on the TV one night. He'd been doing a news conference. I believe it was with the Provincial Treasurer maybe. In any event, I saw the Premier answer a question. The question was, "How are you going to trim the budget?" or something like that. "Are you going to axe jobs?" The Premier said: "No, we'll be doing it by attrition." This is what the Premier said. I believe, if I'm not mistaken, the date was January 4, 1991. So what do you think happens a few weeks later? The first thing I noticed was that the Department of Culture and Multiculturalism engaged in a massive round of layoffs. You know what? They so-called laid off 47 people, right? Those were the positions that they terminated. You know how many were management? Two. Do you know how many of the management jobs were actually cut? One. The other one was a demotion. So guess who got the real axe here. The little people, the workers, the people who do all the collating and the cataloguing and the organizing and the exhibitions and all the rest of it. The people who actually make the museums work. They're the ones that got cut. Then a little while later I find out – I'm still waiting for my answer from the minister on this one – that the foundations are going to be amalgamated and a number of other people are going to be laid off. Well, I don't mind the foundations' being amalgamated; I think that's probably a wise idea. The trick is that you've got to use a democratic system. Once you use a single entry point, you've got to use a democratic system. This minister says, "Well, I'm going to allow applications to be vetted by peer juries." But then he gets to a point that the juries – well, that's not very democratic. [interjection] The minister is saying he doesn't. I look forward to the minister's response on the record in this regard.

What I see is more layoffs. Then I look at other departments, and I see more layoffs. And then I talk to people who work. I mean, I'm talking frontline people, right? You know, the people that don't count, the people who work for six, seven bucks an hour, people who have to answer the phone, do the filing, do the typing, take the griping, get the blame for the red tape: these people who I believe the government believes don't count. These are the ones that are fearing for their jobs.

So now I see Culture and Multiculturalism come before me, knowing that the axe has already fallen. For Cultural Development we're being asked to approve \$11.1 million. Well, is this an increase in some other area of the department I don't know about? Is this a decrease reflecting the 47 positions that were terminated? I can't figure it out from here. Does this include the cost of moving all the people and computers from one building to another, which is what happened in consequence of some bizarre planning on behalf of somebody who evidently doesn't reside ordinarily on our planet? How do I know that that's a useful expenditure of money? I've got nothing here. Do you know what it says? Two, Cultural Development, \$11.15 million. That's all it tells me. Well, I'd like to know how that money is being spent. I would also like to know what proportion of the annual budget this amount constitutes. I'd be happy to know about the whole section, in fact, but I'd settle for that because it's the big one.

The same with Historical Resources Development. Those are the people that really got axed, you know. Some of them are my neighbours. I can assure you a lot of them have contacted me. They'd really like to know where that money is going to. They wonder if it's going to go to some bizarre little venture to bring in an exhibit that nobody will attend. That exhibit will remain unnamed for the time being, Mr. Chairman.

Ah, yes. Environmental Protection, Enhancement, and Research, \$15.3 million. Boy, would I like to know what that includes. Does the Provincial Treasurer know? Will he tell us? Does that mean that we get to have real environmental hearings on the forestry management agreements, for example? The public has been excluded so far; I can't imagine that we'd be suddenly included. But what do you think? Do you think that out of \$15.3 million they could scrape up enough money to conduct environmental assessment reviews on all the projects that they have approved during the last year?

I wonder if the minister responsible for that Water Resources Management – it's probably the Minister of Public Works – has any comment about the \$19.9 million being requested there.

MR. KOWALSKI: Which one was that?

MS BARRETT: It's Water Resources Management under the Department of the Environment: \$19.9 million.

MR. KOWALSKI: What page?

MS BARRETT: Page 4. I just wonder if money involved there relates to the Oldman dam, and in what context. [interjection]

Actually, I hear one of the government members saying, "That's enough." Actually, I think that's close to enough, Mr. Chairman. I think I've made my point. How can we know? We only have person-years involved here. With regular estimates you know how many staff-years are being sponsored and what the programs are. We don't have any of this information in front of us. In fact, we're voting blind, and in that context I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, that the only way to vote on interim supply estimates such as these, which don't tell us anything, is to vote on the side of caution and say no. We don't want government services to come to a stop, and we know doggone well they won't.

MR. JOHNSTON: That's the trap, Pam.

MS BARRETT: That's the trap?

MR. JOHNSTON: That's the choice.

MS BARRETT: That's the choice. I'd like to get this on record. The Treasurer said, "That's the trap; that's the choice." What he's getting at is this: you either vote yes or you're really voting to stop the conduct of the government. I can tell you, Mr. Chairman, there's a lot of conduct of government I would like to put a stop to, but I ain't going to be able to do it through the estimates, I can assure you of that.

In any event, I don't think it is a trap, Mr. Chairman. I think that any reasonable person being asked to approve an interim budget would say, with all due right: "Give me more information. Don't ask me to vote blind. How can I vote on this?" You know, if he would even say, "Well, this represents approximately one-fifth of the upcoming budget" – although I doubt it, because that would be an awful lot of money – or "This represents one-third of the upcoming budget, and yes we've included cost of living in such and such a figure," and give us a few more details about the programs that are going to be funded, I wouldn't have a problem voting yes. I've voted yes in the past to interim supply, but I don't think I will tonight.

9:30

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. DOYLE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There's not much that hasn't been said by the members of the Official Opposition. In fact, I might have to agree with the Member for Calgary-Buffalo on such projects as the Canada/Alberta tourism agreement. There was some \$10 million spent in the national parks in Alberta under the Canada/Alberta tourism agreement in support of hotels. I should remind the Member for Calgary-Buffalo that the leader of his party's family got some \$900,000 out of those particular grants for two of their hotels.

Mr. Chairman, the Canada/Alberta tourism agreement worked fine for those hotels in the national parks, but I must say it has done very little for their competitors that are just outside the parks or at other places in Alberta. I can't understand why at the very end of those particular grants the moneys were handed out to some of their Tory friends, like the hotel on the west side of Edmonton that is one of the biggest funders of the Conservative Party. The ex-mayor of Hinton at the Tara Vista motel outside the park received large funds out of this particular grant, but other Albertans who own hotels in the province were unable to access these grants.

Under Health, the capital projects division, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned the substance abuse foundation, \$2 million. That \$2 million, Mr. Chairman, looks fine on paper, but at the same time the province or the heritage trust fund has contributed some \$13,194,000 to companies such as Carling O'Keefe, John Labatt, Molson Companies class A and class B stocks, Seagram, Hiram Walker resources. The province is now putting money into substance abuse, but at the same time is putting 10 times that amount into the very people that make these substances. It doesn't wash very well with this MLA or with the citizens of Alberta, I'm sure. The Treasurer might say that it is a wise investment, but I think he should be very careful as to what's environmentally friendly and what is friendly to health when they're investing the taxpayers' money in this way.

Under Energy, Mr. Chairman, Renewable Energy Research: another \$300,000. Last year we saw massive amounts of money going into wind energy and solar energy. Those energies have been studied . . .

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, you're a specialist in those.

MR. DOYLE: You'll get your chance, Mr. Treasurer.

These sources of energy have been studied since – well, shortly after Christ was a child. But now we're starting to study them, pile up more studies. Geothermal energy is in full use around the world, in fact in the U.S. and other parts of Canada, but they won't put 5 cents into a renewable and environmentally friendly source of energy such as geothermal. When we turf this government out, Mr. Chairman, we'll see where the renewable resources money goes.

Construction of Government Facilities, Mr. Chairman, under public works. It would be interesting to know whether those are such services as a new forestry centre for the town of Edson that was promised some years ago around election time.

The construction of water development projects is a very needed and worthwhile funding for this government.

Construction of Hospitals and Nursing Homes, \$40 million. Where are they going? Is this the St. John's hospital that was promised in the last provincial election? Is this the extended care beds that were promised around this province prior to the last election, Mr. Chairman?

Construction of Social Housing. Indeed, seniors and people on low incomes need funding for those facilities, but the

Minister of Municipal Affairs, I'm sure, has a very good hand on those things, having sat in the opposition for so many years.

Occupational Health and Safety, Mr. Chairman. Does industry no longer research safety on the job that we have to put some \$354,000 under Occupational Health and Safety Research and Education? Is this for government employees, or is this for other, private individuals?

Municipal Recreation/Tourism Areas. I understood from the minister – perhaps I was wrong – that this fund ended this year, and now we have another \$465,000. I was under the impression that this was the last year of the Municipal Recreation/Tourism Areas grants. Of course, urban parks development is ongoing for the major cities in the province.

Assuming that Individual Line Service is the private lines for rural Alberta, I would like to know from the Treasurer if this is the completion of the rural line services.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that perhaps other members from my caucus would like to say a few words. I see no reason how we could support this particular allotment of funds with no more information than we have in front of us.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Wainwright, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and speak in favour of the interim budget estimates here tonight. I might have a suggestion or two, but in view of the fact maybe that the numbers only came here today for us to look at, we could delay our process for a month and not pay any bills. We could come back here in a month. We would save over a billion dollars. We would get our budget balanced. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please.

MR. FISCHER: It would save a tremendous amount of time, and maybe that would be the fairest way to do it. I know that you would have to make a few exemptions for the utmost needy, but it looks to me that with our Legislative Assembly especially there, each one of us could forgo a month's salary. Maybe our education system – we could let them have a month's holiday. Maybe it's worth it to balance our budget. I think it could possibly be just as fair a way sometimes, especially the way the opposition are suggesting that we do it.

I would also like to make one comment, and it's about our Northern Lights library system. I sat here and listened to the Member for Vegreville talk about what all of the other members said to board members and so on. He was reading from a piece of paper there, and I know that I myself have never once ever said that the location had anything to do with the funding of that. I think it's wrong that someone would say that when there isn't any proof whatsoever. It's totally untrue. It's misrepresentation. We worked extremely hard to find money for that system, and we had to get bits and pieces from different systems across the province to do it. Of course, they had to be delayed one year, and it's a shame. It's a disgrace for the member to talk that way, because that's a good board and it's a good system.

Anyway, I hope the Treasurer will take my suggestions under consideration. Thank you.

9:40

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by Edmonton-Kingsway.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The Treasurer knows well my opinions about the budget process in general, of which this is just a funny little slice that we're looking at tonight. The whole budget process I see as being clumsy and secretive and almost incomprehensible. It has an absolute need for reform, Mr. Treasurer. I think that's well understood throughout the province.

Tonight's episode is no surprise. It's a list of numbers related to almost nothing, and yet we're being asked to somehow sanction this and endorse it and legitimize it. How can I, Mr. Treasurer? That's asking an impossible kind of question. You must know that one cannot with conscience support this kind of thing.

Mr. Chairman, this is the most incredible kind of exercise. Monty Python would eat his heart out. I do have a few direct questions for the Treasurer about it. In Education, Mr. Chairman, to the Treasurer, I'd like to know if your government is considering any of the very important programs that have now been identified as being needed in this province related to youngsters who have particular risks: students who are in poverty situations, students who are experiencing problems with speech pathology, students who are illiterate – whether or not your government has included in this advanced budget any ideas about Head Start programs, school nutrition programs. None of these have appeared anywhere in the literature that I've read currently about what the government is thinking, certainly not in the throne speech; it was never referred to. Yet we all recognize those are needs; in fact, they are increasing demands.

I have a few questions, Mr. Chairman, as well about the Family and Social Services section. We have watched the minister announce a series of reforms. The minister in announcing them admitted that while it was anticipated with those reforms that everyone on social assistance would have some increase, some benefits coming to them as a result of the reforms, in fact perhaps up to 20 percent might get less. We now know that it's vastly more than 20 percent who will achieve less in a time when every other government is recognizing the need for a quality of life for people who are temporarily or for a longer term on social assistance.

Mr. Chairman, to the Treasurer: would the Treasurer care to comment as to whether any of these one, two, three programs listed here have increased funds in them for shelters and to deal with family violence, whether there is in fact any increase in the budget related to family violence for not just shelters but for abusers, for counseling for the abusers as well as counseling for the abused?

I would also like to ask the Treasurer about the costs and evaluation of the work training program announced as part of the social reforms. This I understand is to be tendered out mainly to commercial operations. I think it's incumbent on the government as we are spending money on these programs to determine whether or not they are effective. We've now had two months. It seems to me there's plenty of time for a first run at whether or not the much vaunted programs of finding jobs for thousands of unemployed in our province in fact have worked and if those people have jobs and what types of jobs they are: if they are permanent or what they are.

Mr. Chairman, I also want to know if there is an evaluation program built in. It's clear the government is pushing more and more down into our communities from social services. It's hard to tell from this budget whether family and community support services are increased, whether the amount per capita to the municipalities has been increased or maintained at the former level, which is grossly inadequate.

If I can just turn to health care, my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo asked a number of questions in this. The minister, in giving the 3.5 per cent increase to acute care institutions in January, made some remarks, as did our Premier, about the fact that this would be adequate, Mr. Treasurer, because there were going to be other programs put in place and funded and resources made available that would ease the load on acute care hospitals. I would like to know if, in fact, they are included here. Of course, I refer to things like home care and community service programs, and there's no way of knowing whether they're covered. Community Health Services, which I'm assuming includes public health – it seems to me that there's a paucity not only of information but of dollars here for what is now termed the whole new area in health care in this province and other provinces, and that is in prevention and in developing healthy communities.

Mr. Chairman, children's mental health services were grossly underfunded in the past. Perhaps the Treasurer can comment if there is an infusion of resources in this budget in that regard, particularly in the more isolated parts of our province.

Alcohol and drug abuse, treatment and prevention: we see \$14 million being assigned here. In another document on the heritage fund we see the \$200 million foundation being set up. I would like to know from the minister if the interest from that foundation is going to be expended; if it is tacked on on top of this; if they are two totally separate programs, how they are to be integrated; if in fact we are going to have another \$20 million into drug abuse treatment; and how those two will fit together.

Mr. Chairman, all in all, I find this to be a very backward, undemocratic, and regressive process. But then, what can I expect?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Kingsway.

MR. McEACHERN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions and suggestions for the government.

On page 3 of the main document I see that there's one particular item, Historical Resources Development, for \$9 million or so. I'm really inclined to turn down the opportunity to vote in favour of this budget on that point alone, because as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands was saying, the minister of culture laid off a number of people, actually cut some jobs, although the government had promised they wouldn't.

I just want to mention that one of those that he cut was particularly unfortunate and very badly done. There is a person who worked for the historical resources branch of the department of culture for eight years and yet was never given anything more than temporary appointments and temporary contracts, so that of course they didn't have to give her any benefits and she didn't have any security of tenure. When she had the nerve to speak out and complain about the cutbacks and the layoffs in the department, then of course she never got her contract renewed, in effect was fired for having the courage to stand up and speak her mind publicly because of these layoffs. I think it was a very insidious thing to do. In fact, she wasn't even allowed to go in and get her personal belongings for the longest time. She finally asked me if I would come with her. I offered to go with her, and so we did go and get them eventually. She was afraid, literally, to go into the office to get her belongings because of the way she was treated by the management, as if she were some kind of leper, after eight years of service to that department. Now, for that reason alone one should turn out a budget like this. The minister of culture should at least have

had the courtesy to stand up in this House and defend some of the things that he's doing and tell us a little bit about what this budget is for, what directions they're going, and what things it covers. With that kind of background to some of these estimates, I don't see why he should expect us to support him.

9:50

My critic area is Economic Development and Trade, and if there's anybody in the House that knows anything about this, I do have a couple of questions. In section 2 on the same page 3 under Business and Trade Development, I would like to know if some of this money is going into the export program. It isn't so much that I'm against the export loan guarantee program; it has some merits. However, what I do find totally unacceptable – and it's back to the kind of thing we were telling the Treasurer earlier – is that it is never accounted for specifically by company in a way that you can trace to this program. That is totally unacceptable as a way of keeping the books in this province. Again, why should we vote for some \$7,697,000 for a program that is not properly accounted for in a way that we know specifically who got the money and on what terms and what the benefits there were from the program? The minister likes to stand up and brag about how many jobs were created by how many dollars' worth of exports, but that's just pie in the sky unless he will give us the details.

Number 5 in the same section, Small Business Interest Shielding Assistance, that vote-buying gimmick that the Premier promised in the middle of the last election. Why is that still costing us money? Why should we be putting out \$3 million for that? I mean, interest rates are down around 12 percent now. You're only subsidizing rates over 14 and a half percent, if I remember rightly, in that particular program. So what is anybody doing tied into a program that's paying for over 14 and a half percent interest these days? Are some banks ripping us off because the government's got a program? Is that what's going on here? We need some explanation before we should agree to numbers like that.

Also, I want to look at the Alberta Capital Fund and the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund figures in a little bit more detail. I noticed in the Capital Fund that there's money set aside, some \$18 million, to construct postsecondary education facilities, and I guess I wanted to know if one of the schools in my area, Westglen, is on the list for some of that money. It was promised a year or so back, and perhaps the minister, if he were around, or the Treasurer could answer the question about that. Otherwise, I'm not so sure I want to approve the \$18 million, or at least they should tell us who's getting their turn and when we get ours.

Number 2, Environment, Construction of Special Waste Facilities. Now, that whole facility up in the Swan Hills has been a real boondoggle from the start. Now they want a lot more money, and we're not sure what it is they're going to do with it, whether we're going to be accepting PCBs from Quebec or not. I gather Quebec didn't even ask us to recently, for the last while, and yet the minister is talking about it as if the request is still there. Somebody should stand up and tell us a little bit about what the intention is with this \$2.5 million before we have to vote on it. If nobody's going to do that, why should we vote in favour of it?

If you skip down to number 6 under Public Works, Supply and Services: Construction of Government Facilities, \$500,000. What government facilities? Where? In what small town are we trying to buy the vote now? This government's great at building

buildings. When are they going to start putting some money into running programs in some of those buildings?

In Transportation and Utilities: Construction of Economic Development Infrastructure. What's this? A bridge or a rail line for Daishowa or Al-Pac or something? What is it? Tell us. Economic development infrastructure: big deal. What are we building? Are we building another trade mission in Timbuktu somewhere? What this government should have done is have each minister in the House for this debate, and each one should have stood up and given us a little rundown on what these estimates were for. Otherwise, it's absolute nonsense to ask us to agree to them, because we're being asked to agree to some numbers on a paper that have no meaning and don't point any direction for the government. They're just an accountant's sort of chart that has no meaning whatsoever.

One of the things that concerns me: if you look at the heritage trust fund in conjunction with the Capital Fund, you find an incredible amount of money going into irrigation again. In the Heritage Savings Trust Fund paper, under Agriculture, number 2, Irrigation Rehabilitation and Expansion, \$24.8 million; number 3, Private Irrigation Water Supply, \$1.1 million: approximately \$26 million there. Farther down, under Environment: Irrigation Headworks and Main Irrigation Systems Improvement, \$17 million. Over in the capital budget, number 5 under Public Works, Supply and Services: Construction of Water Development Projects, some \$37.5 million. Now, fine, if somebody would stand up and tell us a little bit about them, what's going on with them, why we need them, what's happening, how many more dollars after these dollars. I mean, there's \$80 million there, and you're asking us to approve \$80 million just by seeing some words on a piece of paper that don't really tell us much about the details, where the help is needed, why it's needed, how much more is needed. So why didn't somebody do that?

Finally, I guess under the heritage trust fund, one more question. At the bottom of the page, Forestry, Lands and Wildlife: Pine Ridge Reforestation Nursery Enhancement, \$1.9 million. So here we're being asked to approve a couple of million dollars. Nobody has gotten up and said what this is for. I mean, we know a bit about what Pine Ridge does. Okay, we know that. But what is the intention? Are we going to pick up the reforestation costs for all these forests cut by the pulp mills that we've announced, or are they going to pay their way? Why shouldn't they pay for these trees?

MR. ADY: We've published that. You know they're going to pay for them.

MR. McEACHERN: Well, we do need a lot more detail than this if we're going to be expected to approve these estimates.

So, Mr. Chairman, I don't understand why the government doesn't have the courtesy to the taxpayers of this province, the people of this province, and to this House to bring in along with the Treasurer every cabinet minister that's got some estimates before this House tonight and have each one stand up and take five or 10 minutes to explain why they're asking for that money, what it's going to do, give some sense of direction of the budget for the year, how much of the budget this represents, and why it's needed. If the government did that, I'd be the first one to vote in favour of it. But if the Treasurer is going to come in here, plunk this on the table, make a two-minute speech and say: "Gosh, guys, you'll just have to trust me that we need this money. Here it is. Vote for it. Thank you very much. We'll move on to something else. Then in a couple of weeks' time

we'll bring in a budget for next year, and you'll see some details."

I'd like to say, like the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has said, that the information in these budgets is totally inadequate, and the information in these interim supply estimates is even worse. It's not good enough, and so I don't see any reason why we on this side of the House should support it. If the member over there would like to give up his salary for a month, that's great. He and the rest of the people back here haven't earned it tonight anyway. Well, he's the only one that spoke. Nobody else has decided to get into the debate and explain anything or answer any of our questions. I don't for five minutes believe that the Treasurer will answer half of the questions we asked. So I for one am not going to be supporting the supply Bill.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question. [interjections]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please. Order.
The Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At the insistence of the Treasurer I must break my silence.

MR. JOHNSTON: This could be my greatest disappointment, Stan.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I certainly don't want the hon. member to be disappointed, personally, since he's such a disappointment to us. There are numerous questions that have been floating around: no answers. Again I don't anticipate that the hon. Treasurer will be kind enough to provide us with any answers. Whether it's because he doesn't have them or because he doesn't want to provide them, I really don't know.

10:00

One of the major areas of concern currently in this province that keeps arising in the House and in the media and everywhere else is this whole area of education and education funding. I notice that there's a whole pile of money being allocated, as well it should be, except that we get this allocation condensed into two or three lines without any kind of explanation, without any kind of assurances given to boards that are currently under very extreme economic stress. I'm referring specifically to the area of Financial Assistance to Schools, one line representing almost half a billion dollars. We've got over a hundred operating school boards, roughly half of which have not received sufficient funds under the current equity formula, and I for one would have liked very much to have seen some indication from the Minister of Education in this request for interim supply that there would be an effort made to address the shortfall there. We could go through the whole process of what education is lacking, but one answer would be sufficient.

The other area of concern, just browsing through this very inadequate document, is the Attorney General's department. In the estimates of last year I believe the minister's office had an increase of 45 percent, the deputy minister's office had an increase of 26 percent, and the courts' downtime had an increase of some 100-odd percent, to the point where the legal system is stretched beyond any reasonable kind of acceptance. If you look specifically at the one field that's very, very important, how the department has to deal with the whole area of child welfare, there are simple cases on the books that are 10 months, 12

months old, where children are placed in limbo simply because the court system is not functioning. Whoever is responsible or however it goes, we're not having it addressed. There's not a single bit of explanation in any of this material as to what's going to be happening there, and I find that quite unacceptable.

We have here a document that, if you do any kind of calculating, would amount to somewhere in the neighbourhood of one-third of the total year's budget, with zero explanations of where it's going to go. I think that's a very unacceptable way in a democracy, to have 10 or 12 xerox pages with one-liners and big numbers behind it and then expect anybody on either side of the House to glibly say: yeah, interim supply; away we go. Where is the rationale? Are we going to have to wait for the budget to be brought down in April? Of course we are, and we'll get as much information then. But at that point, hon. members, commitments will have been made, directions will have been set, and we will be well on our way to another series of requisitions and interim billings and what have you.

Also, I'd like to know in Municipal Affairs - the hon. member there, I wanted to get his attention and see if he was listening. I'm glad he is. How much, if anything, in this interim supply business is going to go towards the operation of West Edmonton Village. I understand that we are now the proud owners for the sum of \$1 of an outfit that on paper is placed at close to \$70 million; in reality, I don't know what it would be worth. I would assume that in here somewhere there should be some approach as to how we're going to go with that. This one has really got me going because I drive by it every morning. I just wonder what's going to happen with that. I would have liked to have seen something there.

MR. JOHNSTON: Why don't you buy it, Stan?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Pardon me?

MR. JOHNSTON: Why don't you buy it for \$70 million?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Well, if you gave me the same kind of deal that you'd give some of your buddies, I'm on. No problem at all. Loan guarantees, free grants: I'll take it. No problem at all, hon. Treasurer, I'll buy it. If you'll give me the same kind of deal, where I continue to operate it without paying you back anything on the loans and loan guarantees, I'll be happy to hold onto it for 10 years, and I'll even maintain it to a higher standard than what's currently being done, hon. Treasurer. Anytime you've got other good deals, cut me in.

MR. JOHNSTON: We'd just have it back the next year if you . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Well, you can see, Mr. Chairman, that I don't think the hon. Treasurer or his colleagues are prepared to give us any kind of explanations, explanations that I think all Albertans are entitled to, explanations that would give them as a government some credibility, explanations that would give us some comfort in knowing that at least the government had a plan, however inadequate it might be. But what we have here are a few pages of numbers and a crisis situation, saying, "Come on; let's go for it, guys, right now or the world will stop." I don't quite see it that way. I would like every department in here to have the courtesy to perhaps give some written expansions of

where this money is going and let Albertans know, all of us know, in fact what is being proposed.

I won't go through all of the departments, because I did rise on the insistence of the Treasurer; I was going to give him the privilege of not having this. But one of the other ones that catches me near and dear to my heart: I would like to know, for example, what is so urgent in the middle of winter that we have to have the roads to resources with a good chunk of money. That's under transportation. There must be a good reason, I'm sure, because we never do anything without a good reason, albeit lately. I would expect that probably there's a dire need for somebody to have something done.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to support this document. I would like to support what's in it. Perhaps I could support what's in it if there was some explanation as to what the contents were all about. In view of the lack of information, in view of the very, very sparse provision, and with the fact that we didn't even receive this document with sufficient time to do adequate comparisons, I for one cannot support this particular request for interim supply.

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. DOYLE: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I had addressed the situation of the substance abuse of some \$2 million. [interjections] Excuse me. Does the minister of culture have the floor, or do I have it, Mr. Chairman? Thank you.

I had addressed the alcohol and drug abuse treatment and prevention saying that there was \$2 million, but that was only coming out of the heritage trust fund. I see that after spending some \$13 million on shares in Hiram Walker, Molson, and all those other companies, Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment, Prevention and Education is actually \$14,112,196.

Mr. Chairman, it gets worse as you go on. This one here smells almost as bad as what it promotes: Control and Development of Horse Racing, \$2,273,910.

Tourism Planning, Development and Marketing, Mr. Chairman. Some great programs have come forward under Tourism. I'm sure there's no great rush for this immediate \$10 million until we can have a better explanation as to where it's going. The Tourism Education and Training certainly is a worthwhile project for many of the people in the tourist industry in this province. In no way would I like to see that program cut.

Construction and Operation of Transportation Systems. I don't know if that's for highways, for the Premier's dream of paving all the secondary roads, or if it's for highways such as the one from Fort McMurray to Fort Chip to Fort Smith in co-operation with the Northwest Territories government. Or is it for the upgrading and paving of Highway 40 between Grande Cache and Grande Prairie and for Highway 40 between Hinton and Cadomin?

Mr. Chairman, I'd like some answers to these questions and why they're asking in such a way for many of these projects that are of no immediate urgency until the estimates are tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Chairman, I apologize, first of all, for expecting too much of the opposition. I say right away that I had just understood, and perhaps assumed wrongly, that some fundamental understanding of the way in which the parliamentary system operated was incumbent upon at least responsible people who would get up and comment on this sort of a process.

But, alas, I was wrong. As we start the next session of the Legislative Assembly, I can see it's going to be the same old song, not much new, not much to say, and we're going to continue to see it on and on again because that has been the theme that's emerged across the way.

10:10

Let me start by saying first of all that this is not a budget. Many people across the way said, "Why did you bring in this budget?" Well, let me tell you, Mr. Chairman, this is not a budget. I'll start by clarifying at a very fundamental level that this is not a budget; these are estimates. Now, those of you who want to spend a moment reflecting how estimates come about will know that in the Mother of Parliaments this process is well accepted. In fact, there are three or four times a year when estimates are introduced in the parliamentary system similar to what we're doing here tonight. Those of you who give that crock argument that this is a nondemocratic process must accept the responsibility for ignorance because in fact this is the right way to do it. This is a traditional parliamentary process, and it's as democratic as any.

I also went on to assume that you people had some fundamental understanding as to how the budget worked. I mean, you know that in the budget we have to pay wages. You know that in the budget we have to make transfers to municipalities, schools, hospitals, advanced education systems, et cetera, and that constitutes an awful lot of our transfers. What we're doing here, Mr. Chairman, is going to the heart of those essential, vital expenditures. We're going to make sure that these very privileged operations which the people of Alberta have here in this province – the great hospitals, the great schools, unmatched facilities – are going to be maintained by this very simple request for a part of the budget.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands chirped away there for a while in her new approach. Presumably she's taken some of these lessons about how to approach this. Instead of being shrill, she was cute, and it's going to be interesting to see how that emerges over the period here, Mr. Chairman. She tries to chirp away through the process, talking blatantly about not having an understanding of the budget, not providing full details. She wasn't here when I gave the outset comments that this was approximately enough money to take us through to the end of June or sometime in July, when even the leaders of the opposition expect the House to adjourn. That's all this is. This is simple appropriations for some of those dollars, nothing hidden. I can assure you that we're not going to make any new announcements, change direction on this particular request for dollars, because that's coming in the budget. I've already announced that we're going to have a budget in the next two or three weeks.

Unfortunately, these people don't understand the process. Of course, the Member for Edmonton-Kingsway: the same old position. He smells a rose, he finds it smells better than cabbage, and then goes on to conclude you can make better soup with it, Mr. Chairman. It's the same kind of hypocrisy that I've seen before from that member. Why doesn't he get back to dealing with the real fundamentals of the issues before us and get on with doing the things he's elected to do and be responsible in his job?

Mr. Chairman, there are some reasonable questions that some of the colleagues did raise. There are some reasoned comments. My colleagues here at various times over the course of this spring session will be called upon to provide you with a wide-range, complete, and comprehensive report on their plan for

Albertans. That plan will be the budget, but in the budget we'll show you the balance. We'll show you how we're going to generate the revenues, where the revenues are coming from, and we'll also provide for a very detailed, comprehensive review of the estimates. This process, the one that all of us have agreed to here in this province, in this Legislative Assembly, which is leadership, as a matter of fact, will provide ample opportunity to debate those estimates: 25 days on general estimates, 10 days on the Heritage Savings Trust Fund, and on and on and on we go. In fact, I don't think the opposition members have ever used the time on the Heritage Savings Trust Fund, yet there's a lot of comments raised here about it.

It simply shows their misunderstanding of this fundamental part of our fiscal plan, unique to Alberta, unique to Canada, important in terms of generating dollars for us. But these people still don't understand it. It's regretful. Then they make these spurious arguments about some sort of political penalty attached to the Member for Vegreville. The only penalty he has attached is the tie he wears, and that's penalty enough, Mr. Chairman. [interjections] There we go; the Member for Edmonton-Kingsway again. He knows little about anything but continues to repeat it.

MR. McEACHERN: Why don't you answer some of the questions we asked?

MR. JOHNSTON: I'm going to, Mr. Chairman. I want to answer the questions. I'm going to take a few seconds to answer some of the questions.

Now, there are some reasonable questions. I'm not going to commit the government or give any detailed outline about the new, unique, exciting, dynamic, visionary things we're going to do in the budget. You're going to have to just stand back and wait for that, Mr. Chairman. You're going to be excited when it comes. You're going to see the dynamics and the aggressive leadership of our Premier in this budget, and you're going to see how the people of Alberta respond to what we have committed to in the plan of action we detailed some five or six years ago. That's going to be here. That's going to be available for all members to comment on, as I mentioned.

In these particular estimates there are at least one or two items that deserve some particular attention. I'm not going to deal with the line items because in the budget itself there are line items. We're simply going to make some reasonable transfers to keep the government operating. As I said, that's a reasonable request of all responsible, elected Albertans in this Legislative Assembly. We want to keep the machine of government operating, ensure that transfers take place. That's all we're asking of you.

There are two unique items, though, that I have to just focus on for a moment. One is in the Heritage Savings Trust Fund capital projects division. The Premier has talked long and I think sincerely about the need to address the question of alcohol abuse and drug abuse, substance abuse, in this province. I would even say that most of the opposition members would agree with that general concept. The Minister of Health later on in the session will be identifying and defining for you the way in which that's going to be provided: the guidelines, the structure of the system.

That now, Mr. Chairman, is in fact a specific comment, a specific commitment within this budget itself. What we have put behind us here is the fact that we are going to do something, because we are going to do something; we've allocated some resources for it.

MR. McEACHERN: Peanuts.

MR. JOHNSTON: A few more peanuts and you chaps are going to attract more monkeys over there, I can tell you that.

That's now been committed to, Mr. Chairman, and as a result we're now on the process of defining how that's going to work. That's going to be defined for the Legislative Assembly and for people in Alberta over the course of the next couple of months. You'll have to wait to see how that's detailed, but in here, properly identified and I think reasonable in its comment, is in fact a commitment to start that process going. Further details will come. The inventory of the program is now put forward.

Secondly, I asked a similar question from the wind expert from West Yellowhead, who asked me about telephone line service programs.

MR. McEACHERN: I asked that too.

MR. JOHNSTON: Well, you're a wind expert too; we'll give you credit for that.

The individual line service program is in its final year of operation, Mr. Chairman. We did transfer, before we privatized AGT, the full amount of the AGT rebate for capital. I believe the total was \$218 million. This amount of money is the last individual rebates for that program to those people with multiple homes covered by multiple lines to get single line service. There's nothing new here. It is the conclusion. It has nothing to do with privatization; we fixed privatization last time. But it was a reasonable question that I think deserved an appropriate answer.

Those seemed to be the two major ones. Now, I could go on and talk about such things as women's shelters. I can confirm that, yes, there will be money for women's shelters, and yes, it will be more than last year. I'm not going to give you any more details than that, because you're going to have to see how we have in fact allocated. The two ministers responsible for social services have done a lot of work redesigning the way in which social services flow to this province. You're going to see that along with education and health, these will become the priorities of our government in terms of expenditure. You're going to have to wait to see particularly how those dollars are allocated. Now, this is not an unusual request, Mr. Chairman, as I've said time and time again. Alas, I fear these people are still going to oppose it. I can't believe it. On one hand, they're saying things like: "This economy is going to go into the soup. There's going to be unemployment." They like this kind of negativism. They like to be on the bad side of the equation. They like to be dour and droopy in the mouth. That's how they get their kicks. Well, it's a reasonable comment, you may argue. But it's not a reasonable comment, because the people of Alberta want future. They want to talk about how the dynamics are going to operate, where their jobs are secure. They know that's where it's going to be, right here in Alberta. We're not just going to present a budget which details the way in which the finances are structured and the estimates are provided, but we're going to talk about the economic opportunity that exists in this province and how our plan is going to strengthen and complement what the private sector is doing to ensure that in the '90s ahead there will be new investment in this province, there will be people moving here to take advantage of a wide range of opportunities, and there will be new jobs.

10:20

The lowest unemployment in the country, highest disposable income, highest retail sales per capita in Canada: that just

doesn't happen by accident. We're proud of the diversification that is taking place in this province, Mr. Chairman. The people of Alberta know that our leadership has effected it over the past six years, and the next step is to get on with the making and growing of this province in the way it should go, and it's going to happen.

Now, that comprehensive plan, Mr. Chairman, which cannot be debated in isolation as the members here are attempting to do, the red herring kind of argument, will be provided to this Legislative Assembly. You will be provided the opportunity to take on this issue and this debate, and we challenge you to compare your ideas with our view of the future for this province in the context of a dynamic expenditure plan, of reasonable opportunity for people to succeed here on an individual basis and to make this one of the finest service places in Canada, with excellent hospitals, amazing educational systems, and a safety net bar none to support those who need the assistance. That's what government is about, and that's what this government's about. And that's the kind of reform that you're going to see from this government when that budget is brought down.

Let's put aside this nonsense, this narrowness. Let's represent our constituents. For those of you who have the faith to vote against the school system, who vote against providing transfers to hospitals, who vote against the funding to universities and colleges, stand and be counted. Stand and be counted, Mr. Chairman. It's easy to sit back and say no, no, no. No, no, no. Well, let's stand and be counted, then, if you really believe that these dollars shouldn't be allocated. Let's see the test of your sincerity. Don't be hypocrites. [interjections]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order in the committee, please.

MR. JOHNSTON: I always learn, Mr. Chairman. [interjections]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please.

MR. JOHNSTON: Even when I'm dealing with the opposition, Mr. Chairman, I learned long ago that you should try to see far enough into these hypocrites to see if there is a sense of sincerity somewhere.

Chairman's Ruling Parliamentary Language

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please. The hon. Provincial Treasurer really shouldn't use the word "hypocrites."

MR. JOHNSTON: Hypocrite? I mean, it's a real defence. You're a lawyer. Truth is a real defence.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Parliamentary words.

MR. JOHNSTON: Okay; they're not hypocrites.

Debate Continued

MR. JOHNSTON: I want to look deep enough into those people who are less than sincere because I want to see at some point if there's a grain of sincerity buried somewhere in their hearts. I always look for it, Mr. Chairman, always look for it.

Well, Mr. Chairman, it's been an easy, exciting evening. I hope that these people have certainly vented some of their views. I think if their constituents could see them they'd be frustrated, if not really ashamed of the way in which they've performed: narrow arguments, inconsequential analysis, false conclusions from their analysis, a lack of understanding of the

I guess that's what we're going to get for the next three or four months. But they said that's the democratic process; they said it would never be easy when you got into this game. It's sure being proven tonight, Mr. Chairman.

I move that members accept this responsibility for getting this interim supply in place, park the money for the time being until we get back to the budget process, and then we'll have an opportunity to take on in the fullest possible way the debate about the revenue side, the expenditure side, the economic performance side. I can commit to you that all the members, all ministers will be able to participate fully in that debate. Mr. Chairman, I would hope that we'll get on with this process.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is the committee ready to decide on the question before it?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question, then, would be: are you agreed to the estimates for interim supply for the year ending March 31, 1992, as proposed by the hon. Provincial Treasurer: the General Revenue Fund in the total sum of \$4,242,657,552; Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, \$60,416,994 for the capital projects division; the Alberta Capital Fund, \$119,730,000? All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung]

[Eight minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

10:30

For the motion:

Ady	Gogo	Nelson
Bogle	Hyland	Osterman
Calahasen	Johnston	Paszkowski
Cherry	Jonson	Severtson
Day	Kowalski	Shrake
Dinning	Laing, B.	Speaker, R.
Drobot	Lund	Tannas
Elliott	Main	Trynchy
Evans	Mirosh	Zarusky
Fischer	Moore	

Against the motion:

Chivers	Hawkesworth	Pashak
Doyle	Hewes	Woloshyn
Fox	McEachern	

Totals:	For - 29	Against - 8
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[Motion carried]

MR. GOGO: Mr. Chairman, I move the committee rise, report progress, and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports all interim supply estimates for the General Revenue Fund, the Capital Fund, and the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund capital projects division.

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling copies of all estimates approved by the Committee of Supply on this date.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: All those in favour of the report, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, I would request support of the hon. members of the House to revert to Introduction of Bills.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: All those in favour of the hon. Deputy Government House Leader's request, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. So ordered.

The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

**Bill 16
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1991**

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 16, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1991.

This being a money Bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this Bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Leave granted; Bill 16 read a first time]

**Bill 17
Appropriation (Alberta Capital Fund)
Interim Supply Act, 1991**

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 17, Appropriation (Alberta Capital Fund) Interim Supply Act, 1991.

This being a money Bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this Bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Leave granted; Bill 17 read a first time]

**Bill 18
Appropriation (Alberta Heritage Savings
Trust Fund, Capital Projects Division)
Interim Supply Act, 1991-92**

MR. JOHNSTON: Mr. Speaker, sir, I request leave to introduce Bill 18, Appropriation (Alberta Heritage Savings Trust

Fund, Capital Projects Division) Interim Supply Act, 1991-92.

This being a money Bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this Bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Leave granted; Bill 18 read a first time]

[At 10:39 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 2:30 p.m.]

