

Legislative Assembly of AlbertaTitle: **Tuesday, April 23, 1991**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 91/04/23

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Schumacher in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: It being 8 o'clock in the evening, the Committee of Supply will please come to order.

head: **Main Estimates 1991-92****Education**

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Chair would invite the Minister of Education to introduce these estimates, which are found at page 109 of the main estimates book with the elements commencing at page 41 of the elements book.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Chairman, it is indeed an honour for me to stand here for a third time to present the 1991-92 budget for the Department of Education to the Committee of Supply: a commitment in this fiscal year to invest, and I underscore the word "invest," \$1,743,000,000 Alberta taxpayer dollars in the most important responsibility that we could fulfill as a government in co-operation with the larger community, and that is to provide our children, all of our children, in this province with the best possible education. In the interests of hearing from many members of the Assembly who I know so desperately want to get into this debate, I will just do a brief overview of the estimates that are before you.

The key vote, of course, is vote 2, where we are investing some \$1,488,000,000 from the General Revenue Fund in the way of grants to school boards and, in addition to this, nearly \$200 million dollars from the School Foundation Program Fund levy on commercial and industrial property. Mr. Chairman, under the SFPF part of the vote we are providing about \$1,258,000,000 in Building and Equipment Support, basic grants, and grants for transportation and buildings, and under the equity program some \$83 million for fiscal equity as well as equity grants to school boards for the important distance learning initiative. That goes to nearly 140 high schools with students numbering less than 150.

As well, some 40 and a half million dollars are for student programs, including vocational education, extension grants, language grants, and grants to four boards in Calgary and Edmonton for high-needs education as well as grants to nearly 60 boards across this province for the important native education project.

Some \$105 million will be invested this year, an increase of nearly 9 percent, in basic special education grants to schools as well as the high incidence grants for those boards that have a higher than average number of students who come to schools with special needs and who bring an extra cost to the education of those kids.

General grants: some \$20.5 million for the important community school program, school food services, as well as grants for the implementation of the secondary education curriculum.

Eighty million dollars, Mr. Chairman, are for early childhood services, the important developmental year when a child is five years of age.

Basic grants, including transportation grants, our program unit grants, and grants for those who are mildly and moderately handicapped and are in need of special attention.

Mr. Chairman, I am proud on behalf of this government to bring to the Legislature a budget of some \$21 million for private school assistance in this province, basic education as well as secondary implementation support.

Finally, in this vote are some \$78 million for the provincial contribution to the payment of pensions to retired teachers under the Teachers' Retirement Fund, an important commitment that this government has lived up to since 1956, when an agreement was cut with the Alberta Teachers' Association. This province, as I informed the House through a question from the hon. Member for Smoky River the other day, has lived up to both the spirit and the letter of that agreement of 1956. We are working now to update that agreement, bring it into the 1990s, and make sure that the government lives up to its responsibility and that teachers have a secure stream of income in the years following their retirement.

Mr. Chairman, I refer to vote 1, where we have Departmental Support Services. Members will be interested in seeing that that vote is actually on the decline in 1991-92, a net reduction of nearly one-half of 1 percent. There we provide services to the department through the deputy minister, through my own office, through financial services, human resources, and planning and information services.

In vote 3 are some \$42.3 million for 1991-92. Here we are devoting our attention to curriculum development, which is an absolutely essential part of our activities within the department, along with student evaluation. Those are two important areas for us, because it is there that the quality product is prepared to be put into the hands of teachers so that they can use their professional expertise to inform, to educate, and to draw out the best from our students. There, also, we provide Language Services background support to develop new language programs. The Alberta Distance Learning Centre, better known as the Alberta Correspondence School in the past, was renamed effective April 1, 1991, to reflect the fact that that is a school that has come into the 1990s and must perform with the technology and the expertise of the 1990s. There, too, we support our native education efforts as well as the regional offices throughout the province.

Mr. Chairman, it's been an exciting year in education, and I know all hon. members may want to comment on some of the things going on across the province and of course within their own constituencies. I had the opportunity at the ASTA convention in November to share with trustees and other Albertans and my colleagues a vision for education through the rest of the 1990s. We've been heavily involved in the review of the whole area of special education. We've talked about fiscal equity and the importance of finding a solution to the fiscal inequities that exist across the province amongst various school boards, and I was proud to put on the table the proposed education trust fund, which is still open for debate. We are looking to find a solution to that serious problem. We've also been talking more recently about year-round schooling.

We've talked about and have been working on, with the hon. Member for Smoky River, the whole area of entrepreneurial education and making sure that our kids acquire those necessary skills to be not just good employees, not just good citizens, but also to be good entrepreneurs, something that we in the Progressive Conservative Party value highly. We'll do our best to instill in our children the values associated with the entrepreneurial spirit.

The Teachers' Retirement Fund has captured many of my colleagues' attention, and we have made a commitment to work with the Alberta Teachers' Association to find a solution to that

problem. Francophone education is something that we have been working on and made a commitment to in the throne speech. The whole subject of boundaries has been an issue of debate, and I'm sure that will continue to rage on and on and on and on. The whole area of history and geography in our schools, dropout rates. We're conducting a human rights survey to determine the attitudes of teachers and students within our schools. English as a Second Language is clearly an issue that some members may want to discuss tonight, along with independent schools.

Mr. Chairman, before I complete my remarks, I want to just inform the Assembly about one modest but innovative initiative that we have taken in conjunction with my colleague the minister responsible for lotteries. We are announcing today that Alberta lottery revenues will be used to pay for the removal of hazardous wastes and chemicals from our schools. We will have a onetime pickup program that will be managed by the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation. This project will begin in the fall of 1991 and be completed by the fall of 1992.

8:10

I want to pay tribute here to my colleague the hon. Member for Lloydminster, Mr. Doug Cherry, who first brought this problem to my attention a few months ago. With his help and with the financial support of Alberta Lotteries and especially my colleague the Hon. Ken Kowalski, my colleagues in the Department of Education have worked with the Special Waste Management Corporation to develop this important initiative. Our consultants will work with school jurisdictions across the province to help them pull together the details of the plan and to look at their ongoing management of hazardous wastes and chemicals in the schools. We will be working with the corporation to develop a waste management policy for schools and a handbook for schools so that they will continue to look after this important problem long after we've made this onetime pickup. The program will hire private-sector hazardous waste companies to collect and classify and package unwanted chemicals, and those chemicals will then be delivered to the corporation's facilities where they will be sorted for reuse and for recycling. The remainder will be shipped to the treatment centre near Swan Hills. Mr. Chairman, I applaud my colleagues who were supportive of this important initiative, very much in keeping with our government's and our party's belief that a clean environment is a healthy environment and that it's the right kind of environment for kids to be attending school in.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I pay tribute to some very important friends and colleagues in the Department of Education, professionals every single one of them. Dr. Reno Bosetti heads the team as the Deputy Minister of Education. To him I owe a great deal of appreciation. He's often guiding me on the right track, and I appreciate his advice and friendship. As well, to the people who work with me in my office: Paul Taylor and Joan Gardener and Susan Kennard and Adeline Lupul. I am indebted to them for their support and their constant assistance that goes on well into the night and is above and beyond the call of duty. Most of all to my colleagues in the Legislature, my colleagues in the caucus, and especially to those members of education caucus, who are always ready to provide advice and support for new and innovative thinking in education. To you, Mr. Chairman, for your support, especially on the whole matter of the fiscal equity debate. If I may, too, say a special thank you to the chairman of the education caucus committee of the government caucus, the MLA for Ponoka-Rimbey and a friend

and colleague, Halvar Jonson, for his wisdom and his informed guidance on educational issues.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to an informed if not lively debate on this important vote that is before the Assembly tonight, and I look forward to answering as many questions from hon. members as they might wish to put.

Thank you very much.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Members of the committee, could we have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Special Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Jasper Place.

head: Introduction of Special Guests

MR. McINNIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased that we have some of the bright young people with us this evening who this education enterprise serves. I'd like to introduce the members of the 2nd Winterburn Brownies. There are 27 of them in the public gallery. They're accompanied by Suzanne Mageau, the Brown Owl, Nancy Wiebe, the Tawny Owl, also volunteer drivers Lorraine Hernandez, Belinda Overdulse, Pat Johnson, and Fran Litton. I'd like them to stand up, please, and receive the warm welcome of the members of the Assembly.

head: Committee of Supply

head: Main Estimates 1991-92

Education (continued)

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments on the Education estimates. Also, I appreciated the hon. minister's very quick overview of what's happening and his almost innocuous slip over some very important issues.

Before I get started, I might say that I am proud to have been, and still am, involved in education for over a quarter of a century in this province. I would like to say that I do agree that Alberta does have a very good educational system. Having said that, however, I would also like to point out that education, like everything else, is in a constant state of change and is constantly in need of improvement. I'm sure the minister will take my comments as nothing but constructive, since I am the advocate for education for the Official Opposition.

During my 25 years in education I've noticed, as everyone has, a profound change in society resulting in greater and greater expectations being placed on the school. It seems that responsibilities that were once the domain of the home, the domain of other institutions, have, for whatever reasons, been shifted onto the school. I think the schools have responded extremely well to the challenge. Consequently, some of this response has contributed to some degree to the rising costs of education. Unfortunately, the shift of rising costs has gone almost totally onto the local taxpayer. The shift in total education costs in Alberta has gone from about 90 percent from the provincial government down to probably just under 60 percent.

I can appreciate the minister's search for equity financing, for equity funding, for equity whatever you want to call it. What I don't understand, however, is why he went back to the old issue

of corporate pooling, something that has been raised on a couple of occasions in the past since 1986. It was a transplant from British Columbia. He did, however, attach a nice new name to it. He called it the education trust fund. Regardless of the name, it is nothing more than an intrusion into what can be conceived as only a historically local tax source.

When we talk about corporate pooling or the education trust fund, I think it's only appropriate to bring everyone's attention to a paper released in September of 1989 that was entitled the Industrial Property Taxation Task Force Issues, Findings and Resolutions, which was put together for the ministers of Education, economic development, and Municipal Affairs. Just to quote one slight piece out of it:

This Task Force was established in response to the belief by some industries that current property assessment and taxation practices in Alberta affect their overall competitiveness in relation to other provinces. More specifically, industry's concerns related to the machinery and equipment tax and its impact on Alberta firms with high levels of investment in manufacturing and processing equipment.

As we all know, a large portion of the corporate pool education trust fund is going to come from something called a machinery and equipment tax. My concern is, quite frankly, and one of the possibilities that could very easily happen, is that the provincial government could be lobbied to remove this and hence to substitute something else possibly – possibly not – and we could end up in a situation of losing an important source of revenue regardless of what fund that would go into.

I think the other thing that the minister is exceedingly aware of is that the opposition to his proposed corporate pool is quite universal: the Alberta School Trustees' Association, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the improvement districts of Alberta, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, and all school boards that represent roughly 65 to 70 percent of the total student population. The school boards that are in support of it – and I certainly do not fault them. They are desperate. They're extremely desperate, and they will support any program, any position that will bail them out, albeit on the short term.

MR. DINNING: Including the people you represent, Stan.

8:20

MR. WOLOSHYN: Including the people I represent. But I feel an obligation to these people that I represent. I have an obligation to these people to point out the shortfalls. One of the shortfalls is that the minister has not – and I stress "has not" – in any way built any long-term factor into it, has not built in a freeze on the increase in local taxation. As a matter of fact, the way the formula is currently construed, it will actually tend to make local authorities increase their taxes in order to access a higher ratio of the so-called corporate pool.

These various organizations which I alluded to a moment ago have all submitted briefs, alternate proposals, and I would challenge the minister to have an objective look at the proposals they are handing out. The other thing that I would like to point out in this same paper that was released in September of '89: there was a recommendation that was followed. It says:

On issues that could not be resolved, particularly M&E taxation where the Task Force understandably could not reach a consensus, industry felt that the issues were well documented. More detailed studies on the effects of specific alternative taxes to M&E taxation may be necessary, but these are well within the purview and capabilities of the various provincial departments.

The Alberta government set up last November or December a committee to review municipal taxation. I believe the reports are due in this June, and I would hope that the minister is going to pay some attention to these recommendations. It's a joint committee involving his department, Municipal Affairs, and various others.

Another area that has created quite a bit of stir is the area of program delivery and, specifically, special needs. Now, I must commend the minister for his document that followed, the two things called Special Education Review action plan. That's a very good document. One of the things that makes me quite lean towards it is that, whether by chance or by design, quite a few of the recommendations in our task force on children appear in similar fashion in that special-needs paper. I would say that if it's only by coincidence, the paper that the New Democrats generated entitled Healthy Children for a Healthy Future at least was on the same track and the same vent as the minister's action plan for special needs.

If you go into that action plan, although I agree with it in general, there are some areas of concern. I won't go through all of School of the Future: a Vision for Alberta, but there are a couple of points made there that I think should be well understood by everyone, and that is the number of students, for whatever reason, that are now being identified as having special needs. The other observation which I think is very relevant is that "the school of the future in Alberta will make comprehensive family services accessible." That's something that we've been advocating on this side of the House for quite some time; that is, to have a co-ordinated multidepartmental approach to servicing children who attend schools, albeit going beyond what could be construed as strictly their educational needs.

Recommendation 4, I believe, in that paper gives me some concern. It says:

School systems should have clear procedures for obtaining funds or services from the government department, or other sources, responsible for providing specific services.

This has been an area of contention for a considerable period of time. I'm glad to see it identified in there, and I would like to see more specifically some very definitive action taken on that. Perhaps the minister would like to elaborate later on in the evening on what he intends to do there.

The other parts of this particular document are quite good. Some parts give me a lot of concern also, however, and that is the one where it deals with students requiring medical attention and how that's all going to fit in with the teachers being responsible for administering all sorts of medications and all sorts of special services.

The other interesting thing that is in here – there are all sorts of nice little directions, but the one that I think should have special attention paid to it is that schools in co-operation with community agencies should design preventative and developmental programs to reduce the incidence of students with health, learning, and social problems. We can't stress that enough. I would like to see this paper pursued more. I know it's only a discussion paper; at least that's what I understand it to be. Hopefully there will be a lot more input coming down the road.

Still sticking with the whole issue of education financing costs, because that's generally what we unfortunately always end up talking about: who pays and how much and where does the money come from and how is it spent. This same industrial property taxation task force had an interesting observation in it. Now, keep in mind that these words are coming from the representatives of the three government departments involved. It says:

Because education is a provincial responsibility, the provincial government with its broader tax base, should fully fund the prescribed program of studies deemed to be both necessary and sufficient for students in today's society. Local jurisdictions should be responsible for funding only locally determined educational enhancements (i.e. a true supplementary requisition).

To get back to the education trust fund for a moment, the proposals surrounding that did not address in any way, shape, or form how the division of responsibilities, if any, would occur.

It goes on to say – and this one the minister touched on ever so slightly in his opening remarks.

It is recommended that a Boundaries Commission be established to review the current boundaries for educational jurisdictions. There are approximately 150 operating school jurisdictions in Alberta, many of which are both administratively, fiscally, and educationally inefficient. As school boards are required to rely more and more on the local requisition to support their educational costs, the disparity between those jurisdictions with a high assessment and those with low assessment increases. There is now a growing realization that if we are to achieve a semblance of fiscal equity, something must be done about structural equity.

I think that this recommendation – and again I can only stress that it comes from within the government itself – should be followed. I would like to see the minister strike a boundaries commission forthwith to have a look at it, because with the way the finances of the province are, with the importance of education, with the need to spend every dollar wisely, if a government task force comes out and identifies jurisdictions that are fiscally, administratively, and educationally – and I stress again educationally – inefficient, I think that those jurisdictions, if they in fact exist, should be weeded out and sorted out. If this observation of the task force is in error, then indeed we owe it to the public to show that aspect too, to show that every operating jurisdiction in this province is in fact doing the job that it should be doing. But I don't believe for one moment that we can turn our backs on that very, very important issue, because it does have an impact on whatever we strive to do in this province.

I'm going to get a little bit more specific and try to go – I stress try to go – to the votes. When you look at them, they sound and look pretty good. The only darn trouble is that they can't be believed. If you go to vote 1, it says, Departmental Support Services. We see some nice numbers there: \$13,086,000; comparable 1990-91 estimates, \$13,129,000. That sort of touched off a little bit of an alarm, because something didn't add up. So I went back to last year's estimates, and when I looked at what they had in the estimates book for last year, the actual number that I found there was \$11,899,365. So we add \$1.2 million to last year's number, put it into this year's book, and come out with Departmental Support Services being a decrease of whatever it is. I'm sure there's an explanation, and I'll wait patiently for it.

8:30

MR. DINNING: Well, ask. Ask the questions. That's why you're standing and talking.

MR. WOLOSZYN: No, I'm talking to get your attention.

There's one thing that shows there are 14 elements instead of 12. We've got another assistant deputy minister on the books with a budget of a quarter million dollars. The other question that I will ask is: how did we arrive at a change in the numbers from one book to another, and why is more bureaucracy necessary?

Especially since I went and I looked through votes 1, 2, and 3 of last year's manpower allocations, compared them to this year's votes 1, 2, and 3, and tried to come to some semblance

of reality here. What I found was that if you looked at last year's full-time equivalents in vote 1, they were supposed to start off at 207 and diminish to 196. But I look in this year's, and I see that they are starting off at 220 and going down to 205; that would give us a bit of a gain of nine, I believe it is. The permanent full-time positions last year started off at 194 and were supposed to go down to 189. This year they start off at 209 and end up at 196.

Well, I thought perhaps there were some departmental reorganizations because the money numbers didn't add up either. So I went to vote 2, and there's not much change there. Seven bodies were supposed to leave; not quite left. Fine and dandy; we have no problem there. So I go to vote 3, and by golly, Mr. Chairman, that one really got me going, because in vote 3 we lost 100 people. What started off as a target of 543, down from 575 in full-time equivalents, is now shown starting at 497 and decreasing to 475. So we've got a change of 100 in a year. I don't know what has happened where we lose roughly 140-some bodies in a book between estimates of last year and estimates of this year, and I certainly would appreciate an explanation of whether that is strictly an error, or whether 140 people have disappeared off the face of the map. And I quite sincerely mean this. I tried very hard to balance those manpower numbers between the three votes, and I came up with 140 positions short. That means they disappeared. Where they went is the question. That one I think begs a bit of an explanation. I'm sure there is one.

When we go to vote 2, Financial Assistance to Schools, I still am and the New Democrats still are of the opinion that 80 to 85 percent of the overall funding should be picked up by the province. They should follow some of the recommendations of their own task forces. When we're looking at new and novel ways to generate revenues, I think the input of all concerned stakeholders should be looked at, and perhaps we can come up with something that might be fair.

But unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, we have not been keeping up, no matter how you slice it, in terms of our financing of education. For example, in 1984 Alberta was second in the country on spending per pupil. At that time the per pupil spending was \$4,270; the department budget was about \$1.1 billion. In 1989 the per pupil spending is a little over \$5,000; a budget of \$1.2 billion from the central government. We have slipped in six years from second place to fifth place. Now, we all can appreciate that it's not just the dollars but how they are used, but I think this shows a trend of diminishing support of education in Alberta, and I think that should be looked at very, very, very closely. I think some of the parts of the problem are that we haven't kept up properly on the school foundation program, and I would like to see some rethinking done as to how that particular program is applied.

I don't particularly want to get into looking at full percentage increases or decreases, because really on their own standing they don't have any real merit. However, what I would like the minister to point out to the House in his response is: what are the actual dollar increases, per pupil basis, from the school foundation program in terms of transportation? What are the real dollar assignments going to be? Because we all know that if we have a larger number of students coming in – and Alberta's population is growing – we will automatically require a larger amount of money to fund this, and it doesn't necessarily mean that individual areas will benefit.

The area of equity grants: I find this one to be very, very much of a shortfall. The measly .9 percent increase of last year contributed to the problem that a lot of the small boards are

having this year, who are waiting for the trust fund to be their salvation. Unfortunately, from my calculations that grant is going up by roughly \$5 million, whereas we really require in excess of \$20 million to catch up for last year. So we still have last year's shortfall, and we haven't done the catch-up this year.

MR. DINNING: Catch-up on what?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: On the equity funding for the schools, the numerous small jurisdictions that are crying for assistance.

MR. DINNING: Stan, what's your solution?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Well, we'll get to that later, when I finish this.

MR. DINNING: What's that?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: We'll sit down sometime; we'll have a solution. Mr. Chairman, I would be only too glad to sit down with the minister and for his edification offer him a solution. When I offered that to the Minister of Energy, he rejected my offer, so I find it difficult now.

The community schools are still waiting; the ones that have been designated are still waiting to be put on the funding role. These were schools that two or three years ago were put on freeze. They had their charters in place. They had everything done. They've even got names on the buildings. I think that the minister should rethink this particular aspect and thaw out the freeze a little bit so that we can have the schools that met all the criteria treated fairly, albeit retroactively, so that we can end up having that community school business put in order. I'd also like to hear a commitment from the minister that community school funding and community schools as they currently exist will not be tinkered with down the way, or at least while he is still Minister of Education.

One of the areas that the minister alluded to was high-needs schools in Edmonton and Calgary. I would say that this initiative is a step in the right direction; however, I would like ask the minister if there has been an evaluation or review done specifically of which schools these moneys have gone to and the effect that they've had so that we can look down the way, tie it in with his action plan to start addressing some of these very, very needy situations. I would believe they exist in more than just Edmonton and Calgary, but that's a good place to start. From the information I get from people in both Edmonton and Calgary, there is a real need to get on with it, and I think rather than just assigning an arbitrary amount of money, the time has come to look at what we are going to do and put it into play.

8:40

The whole area of English as a Second Language, I think, has to be looked at. We have to look at it to see that the spirit of the policy of English as a Second Language is being lived up to, and that's the language policy of 1988. I'm not so sure that the spirit of that particular policy is being followed. I would say that in terms of the schools that have high enrollments of English as a Second Language students, the time to implement two-year counts would be in order.

MR. DINNING: Two-year?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Twice-a-year counts – I'm sorry – both a September and a February, and I, quite frankly, would be able

to support the minister within certain guidelines if it went up or down.

MR. DINNING: Up or down?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Up or down.

MR. DINNING: Good. It's on the record.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: That's a good place for it, Mr. Minister, because when I say this I mean it, and I wouldn't want to con you. I wouldn't want to do a 140-body loss on you.

The other part that I think really has to be looked at is the length of the program. To put an arbitrary number of 3 on the funding for a pupil may be too short, as most people say; it may even be too long. Instead of strictly a funding for X number of years for an individual, I think we should be looking at a level of proficiency to qualify or, better still, a lack of proficiency in order to qualify for the funding.

The other area that perhaps has to be looked at is the business of the older students who are trying to get their standards of English proficiency to a level that would put them into a competitive position in colleges and universities. I think that is one area that could be explored. The other one that I think has to have a good look is the whole area of Alberta-born children whose first language is not English. There are probably in the neighbourhood of 3,000-plus of them sporting around the area and various places. I think that we would be wise to look at that particular problem too.

The minister did mention ECS and the funding there. Along with ECS I was hoping to hear what the plans are – and this goes along with the high-needs areas – for something called early intervention. I think that the ECS program is the logical place in which to budget for early intervention, and I believe that there is a variety of approaches that could be used in this particular area. What it would do, basically, is be a real investment in education if some of the needs of these children could be turned around so they do become successful in school. I think the return on the dollar would be very, very, very high.

The long-term solution, as the minister is well aware, is not early intervention, and it's not a lot of other things. It's a matter of some societal adjustments which neither he nor I can implement alone nor would we try, I'm sure, and that is the elimination of something called poverty. I think this is one area where the special needs action plan does not address – I don't believe; I could be wrong there – the early intervention and the early childhood and could be that.

The other area that the minister touched on very briefly is the business of the Teachers' Retirement Fund.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Chair regrets to advise the hon. member that his time has expired.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will bring the rest up at a later time. We're down to the end of vote 2, Mr. Minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order please.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight.

MRS. GAGNON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am certainly not one who criticizes the quality of our schools. As a matter of fact, I always defend our schools every opportunity that I get. The reason for that is that anyone who goes into our schools and

speaks to the teachers and the students and listens to them as well knows that our education system is very, very good. We have some serious social problems such as, abuse, poverty, and neglect, which impact our schools, and of course there's the all-pervasive influence of television, which is sometimes negative. Nevertheless, I truly believe that our schools have vitality and that learning is meaningful and realistic.

In general, Albertans believe in our school system. It's one of the few things they still believe in, and I do as well. Having said all of this, we know, however, that everything is not perfect, and as critic I have the obligation to point out some of the problems and to ask some of the questions.

Let me start by indicating what I think are three themes that we must all stress. Philosophically, I believe we must develop the attitude that schools should equip young Albertans to take the initiative for their own learning, now and during all of their lives. Secondly, I believe that we must all celebrate student achievement no matter how big or how small that achievement is. Thirdly, I think that we have to recognize as a society the expanded mandate that we've placed on our school systems, and in recognizing the expanded mandate, we must then fund appropriately so that the school systems can fulfill this mandate which has been thrust upon them.

Let me say at the outset that one of the issues I dealt with last year, one of the concerns I talked about, has been partially dealt with in the minister's announcement about the infusion of funds for construction of badly needed schools throughout the province. All of us, however, know that there exist a number of older schools in need of renovation because of possible asbestos, lead, and other materials. I'm very happy to learn this evening that the minister has arranged a rescue plan for these schools through the use of lottery funds. I think it is a very good use of the funds, and this will ensure that our schools will now be safe and healthy places to be.

Alberta's school population continues to increase; however, it seems as though the number of teachers has not increased proportionately. There is a growing shortage of teachers in specific areas throughout the province, forcing school boards to hire people who do not have formal education. This is happening at the same time as our faculties of education have quotas and are turning away students. Can the minister please tell me how many permanent certificates have been given to otherwise unqualified teachers, and what is the minister doing to rectify this very troublesome situation?

Another area of concern is the problem of conflict of interest and the trustee. I alluded to this issue last year during budget estimates, and I would like to ask the minister when he will finally define conflict of interest guidelines so that the courts will not be forced to do so.

MR. DINNING: For the school trustees?

MRS. GAGNON: School trustees and their conflict of interest.

Part 8 of our new School Act, amongst other provision, allows for the operation of separate schools. The original purpose of this section, as defined in the Northwest Territories ordinances, was to protect religious minorities in the province. It seems as though these sections are now being used for other purposes by certain school boards, and I would like to know if it is the intention of the minister to allow this to continue.

In the whole area of corporate pooling, something we've all spent a number of hours talking about this last year, it is unfortunate that the minister, in trying to sell his plan, created some polarization and division among the school boards.

Nevertheless, I would like to congratulate the minister for delaying the implementation of his proposal, because I think if we all work together, we can come up with something better. I'm very pleased that the minister understood the fact that the education mill rate impacts on all of taxation at the municipal level and that we could not resolve the problems in one area, education funding, in isolation from the entire area of municipal services funding and municipal assessment. I would like to point out, however, that the equity question will never be resolved unless the boundary issue is also resolved, and I would like to ask the minister if he is going to accept the ASTA recommendation for a boundary review to resolve concerns about a perceived proliferation of school boards.

Further, I'd like to add that the problem of equity in resources has worsened because education grants have not kept pace with inflation. For instance, this year we see a 3 and a half percent increase, yet inflation is at 6.8 percent. That's the real issue. The issue is that education funding has not kept pace with inflation, highlighting the fact that at the local level there are differences in the property pool available.

8:50

In the area of native education, which we've talked about quite a lot recently, the Cawsey report gave a damning condemnation of the criminal justice system and indicated that education was one of the keys to informing and assisting native students. It is imperative that our school system assist the families of native students in this endeavour. What additional steps has the minister taken to encourage curriculum development for native students, focusing on their rich culture and thus encouraging greater self-esteem? Further, what steps has the minister taken to ensure that all students – not only native students but all students – are enlightened about native history and culture? I believe that more native history and culture must be mandatory at the high school level. The tolerance and understanding report of 1974 said that native education in this province was deplorable. Thank God there has been a lot of improvement since that time, but there still is the issue of the funding for the 19- and 20-year-olds, something again which came up a few days ago.

The issue is that students who are 19 and 20 want to stay in the school system. They don't want to go to AVC. PICS and Ben Calf Robe are the types of schools where they feel most comfortable, where their own educational gaps can be made up within a comfortable environment. Some way has to be found to allow them to stay in those schools and to receive funding. I am told that at PICS 47 percent of the students don't qualify for funding. The same situation exists at Ben Calf Robe, and I understand that at Ben Calf Robe there is a list of 150 people waiting to get in. Now, here is a success story. When something good is happening, why don't we make sure that we support it and allow it to continue to happen?

Another issue which I brought up last year was the need for liaison workers between the school system and the home of native children, that home usually being on a reserve. The students sometimes go, for the first time, to grade 10 in a neighbouring town or village and there's a lot of adjustment for them and their parents. We must find a way of providing liaison workers to help both the parents and the student to make that adjustment to help them deal with their new circumstances.

We've talked a lot about the need to eradicate discrimination and prejudice in our schools, and I would like to ask the minister if he would encourage more boards to offer the intercultural education program or one similar to that which is being offered by the Edmonton Catholic school board.

I also would like to speak about ESL funding. Alberta is welcoming immigrants at a record rate, and it is something that we will continue to do in the future and that we have to do. These people, however, do not show up no later than September 30. The children arrive at school continuously throughout the school year. Last year, or maybe it was the year before, I suggested two funding dates to the minister. He indicated some interest, and I would like to ask him: has he implemented two funding dates for ESL?

MR. DINNING: Would you support it?

MRS. GAGNON: Definitely.

MR. DINNING: Okay. Up and down?

MRS. GAGNON: Maybe two isn't enough, but two will do. Up only. Oh, up and down? Well, as long as it meets the needs. If the number of students goes down, of course you wouldn't have to fund as much. That only makes sense.

MR. DINNING: It's on the record.

MRS. GAGNON: ESL funding is also only for a period of three years. Clearly that is not enough when the children are older, particularly in junior and senior high. It just won't help them to become fluent enough to go out into the workplace and become self-sufficient. So there should be a consideration of extending the funding for more than three years.

Related to all of this issue of ESL is the fact that a number of students who are in early childhood services do not get ESL funding, making them have-not students the day they arrive in our kindergartens. Will the minister consider funding for these young students so that they do not start school with a disadvantage? As my colleague from the NDP mentioned, there are some Canadian-born students who are not fluent in English when they arrive at school, and I believe that it is important for the minister to consider providing English as a Second Language for these young Albertans as well. As I've said earlier, this area is continually evolving and expanding, and it seems to me that teachers will have to receive sufficient training to become very current with the needs, and also they will have to have updated materials to make sure that they have sufficient resources to provide the education that is needed by these English as a Second Language students.

An area which is concerning more and more Albertans recently is that of violence. Our children are continually bombarded with scenes of violence in movies, TV, and newspapers. They even see it coming from some of our prominent sports figures. This has a profound influence which has been well documented and leads to inappropriate behaviours. I believe that some of our young people see aggression as the only way to resolve conflict. Again, an issue that must be looked at because if we don't look at it, we will see a proliferation of violence, of violent fighting, and of desecration of public buildings. I would like to suggest to the minister that we must find ways of dealing with the problem of violence in the schools and the impact of violence on our children.

In addition, there is the problem of the Young Offenders Act and the fact that in most cases it is a condition of parole for the young offender to attend school. In many cases the behaviour of the young offender is somewhat disruptive and also a problem for the classroom teacher. Will the minister discuss this matter with the federal Justice minister, suggesting a closer examination

of the Act to effect changes to the legislation if necessary? One possible solution which has been offered is that the students might attend alternative programs outside of the school system. This is one that I would encourage the minister to look at.

I have alluded to the problem of high-risk students and their susceptibility to dropping out of school. As we all know, dropout rates in Alberta are worrisome, in the neighbourhood of 30 percent. There have been innovative programs in Red Deer and Fort McMurray, again programs that all school boards should look at to address this problem. The minister referred to the problem in his speech to ASTA last fall when he said: I want to see the dropout rate drop by 10 percent. What has the minister done to fulfill his wish that this dropout rate decrease by 10 percent?

I want to talk a little bit about distance education, a wonderful program allowing accessibility to a variety of programs to all students wherever they live in Alberta. It seems, though, that the earlier commitment has declined. I don't know if it's because start-up costs have been withdrawn or exactly what the situation is, but I would like the minister to rededicate his department to distance education and to explain to this Assembly why so many school boards are very, very concerned about the decline in funding for distance education.

I read a most curious article in the *Calgary Herald* lately which said that there were children in the Coutts area of Alberta going to school in Montana. I would like to know why this is occurring. Can the minister tell me why an Alberta student would go by bus across the border to another country to school? What is going on?

I also want to congratulate the minister for establishing the Special Education Review committee. As we all know, special needs children must be identified, and we must take aggressive and interventionist roles to make sure that they don't later become high-risk students. The interim report talked about co-ordination between departments and so on, something that we all support. I would like to know, though, if the minister is leaning towards a children's secretariat as a means to co-ordinate the services or if he has any leanings one way or the other as regards meeting the needs of addressing social, medical, and educational issues and so on.

9:00

It seems as though the parents of special needs students gravitate to major centres such as Calgary and Edmonton because of the availability of hospitals and other specialized institutions. This, of course, has caused a major impact on these major centres. For instance, 11 percent of Calgary public's budget is spent on only 5 percent of these students. Will the minister consider increasing the grants for special needs students to accommodate the discrepancy, or would he consider funding on the basis of pupils served, something which I believe is supported by a number of trustees in the province? Also, if full and complete integration is to occur, will adequate resources – medical, legal, and so on – be available to assure the success of this approach? There is no point in having full and complete integration unless all of the components are in place to ensure its success.

Again, teachers need to be in-serviced, trained, and updated to make sure that they are comfortable with integration. Also, we need to look at the whole matter of legislation to ensure that there is no liability on the part of teachers in case of accident or medication or whatever with the special needs students.

One of the social areas which we've alluded to is that of students coming to school hungry and poorly clothed. This

phenomenon seems to be more prevalent in the cities than in the rural areas, and we do have a high-needs program. I would like to ask the minister how this high-needs program is doing. Is it successful, and will it continue?

In the area again of Early Childhood Services, it seems as though cutbacks there have caused the nutritionally high-needs student program to be shelved, and also they have caused a cutback in the number of consultants for the priority curriculum program. Will the minister address the problem of the lack of early childhood consultants? Also, where is the money for the articulation of the elementary program, and what is happening with program continuity? Was that ever explained? Did it ever come to be? Did it come to pass? I thought it was an exciting move. I know there was some opposition to it, but it seems to me that with enough in-service and enough explanation, parents all over the province would have supported the program continuity. I'd just like to know what has happened. Has it taken hold?

In talking about the number of consultants in early childhood, I wonder if we couldn't find the money for them by eliminating a very expensive and extensive testing program at grade 3. Not only is it costly, but I don't think that it is possible to test the abilities of youngsters at the grade 3 level. Will the minister consider abolishing or at the very least downsizing grade 3 achievement tests?

I would like to congratulate the minister on establishing the committee which is looking at article 23 of the Charter, governance rights for francophone parents. I'm quite convinced that by honouring minority educational language rights across the province, in all the provinces, we will find one way to keep this country together.

I am still concerned, Mr. Chairman, with the two high school diplomas and the certificate of achievement. I think it is causing some students to undertake inappropriate programs because there is a snobbery involved, or so it seems, with the advanced diploma. Still pertaining to the area of high school education, has the review of practical arts in the technical and vocational education been completed? Also, what about the 8,000 students, graduates of our school system, who returned to school last September because they could not get into a postsecondary system and they wanted to upgrade their marks? How are the school systems coping with this phenomenon? I think, also, it is a phenomenon which will become worse in the coming year, because even more students are being turned away from postsecondary institutions.

The minister it seems is very proud of his leadership in regards to the program of establishing national indicators of student achievement or national standards. I would like to know what the progress of this program is, and I would also like to know where the minister found the money to foot the bill for establishing these standards in English proficiency. Is this vote 3.2.2?

Well, Mr. Chairman, I've mentioned approximately 20 issues. There are many, many more. Really I think the most crucial is that we must find a way to provide equity in funding and opportunity, which is not the same as equality in funding and opportunity. As we know, equal is not always fair. The minister mustn't look only at the number of students; he must look at the costs entailed in providing education for a variety of students in a variety of settings. There is no such thing, as we all know, as the average student. I look forward to a fair resolution of the equity problem, one which will leave local authority intact. I know that many groups are looking for solutions, and as I said earlier, I know that we will find solutions because we are

working together and we are discussing avidly what the solutions might be. Once we have resolved the funding issue, I am sure that we can get on to creating excellence.

Let me add one other area, which is that in addition to the inflationary influences school boards will be hit with paying higher medicare premiums and fuel taxes. As we know, school boards are staff intensive and all of them run their own transportation systems, so they are greatly impacted by medicare premiums and fuel taxes. In light of these two problems as well as the inflationary influences it is very clear that overall the grant is insufficient. I don't believe that this government sees education as an investment. I know they are spending millions of dollars, but it seems as though those dollars do not go far enough to truly meet the needs that exist.

I would like very quickly to just ask a few specific questions about the votes. In vote 1 there is the Purchase of Fixed Assets; if that could be explained. Are these computers for the offices, whatever? There is an increase of 41.7 percent.

Vote 1.0.7, a decrease in School Buildings Services, a drop of 8.3 percent. Hopefully this is not a foolish economy.

Vote 1.0.8, funding for a position, I believe, which is raised by 22 percent in the past two years. Maybe the minister could explain this. In fact, staff reductions elsewhere: no problem if the minister needed additional staff, but it would be nice to have an explanation.

Vote 3.1.2, evaluation services. Very, very high: \$7 million. Maybe we are overdoing student evaluation. It's something that I think should be looked at very carefully. Maybe the money could be better spent in educating students rather than testing them all the time.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

Vote 3.1.6, distance education, reduced by 12.3 percent. An explanation please.

Vote 3.1.5, Response Centres. I would like to know how they are doing, and why the funding is up only .7 percent.

There is also the area of Regional Services: down somewhat. Does this mean a loss to rural Alberta or a loss of services to all those jurisdictions outside of the two main areas?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I do look forward to the minister's response to my questions and also his response to some of my observations. Along with my colleague from Stony Plain, who has experience with education in a different area than mine – mine was as a school trustee – I think we can assure the minister of our continued interest and our continued support to make sure that the students in Alberta continue to have what is an excellent school system, one that I am very proud of and one that we should all be proud of.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Smoky River.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to express appreciation for the excellent work that our minister and his staff have provided in what is no doubt one of the most important portfolios in our government and in our province. I think the true dedication of our minister came to light very dramatically during his discussions this past year regarding trying to find some new way of establishing a new and fairer source of funding. This hasn't been one that's been totally accepted in all areas. It's been a difficult challenge, and I'm sure and I'm very confident that with the perseverance of our minister indeed a solution will be developed, one that, no doubt, everyone may

not agree to but one that will indeed be fair and equitable to our education system. That's really the essence and the most important ingredient that we have to try and pursue and the most important ingredient that we have to try and achieve.

9:10

So I would hope the minister is not discouraged with the length of time that it has taken to find the solution. I would encourage the minister to pursue and to continue his efforts to find a method. It is unfortunate, though, Mr. Chairman, that we've had the two opposition critics speak in very eloquent terms, very critical terms of the minister not finding a solution, but offering no solution of their own whatsoever. That really isn't a fair way of handling a problem. I really feel that we're in this together, whether it's opposition members' children or whether it's government members' children or whoever's children: they're still all to be educated. We all have a responsibility to try and come forward with some sort of a fair and equitable solution to this problem. I would hope that although the critics let us down, perhaps some of the other speakers in the opposition will come forward with some sort of a solution that indeed will be beneficial to us.

MR. LUND: Just more money; that's all.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Of course, their usual solution – you're right, hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House – is: government, just throw money at it. That's great, but there's only one taxpayer, and we're still having to pay for it. The very fact that it's government still means it's dollars; it still means the taxpayers have to pay for it. So much of our effort has to be focused in another area: how to provide the service in a more beneficial and yet in a more cost-effective way. I've had an excellent opportunity being part of the education caucus. I've seen the efforts that the minister and his people have been bringing forward in trying to deliver an equitable or even a better, an improved, an enhanced service at a more reasonable cost and more cost-effective way. I commend you and I compliment you and I encourage you to keep up those efforts.

I think one of the areas that was addressed was the dropout area, and that's one that I would like to spend a few moments on. I think it's one that is a concern to all of us, an area that presents problems downstream in other areas, in other portfolios. Mr. Minister, I wonder if perhaps we couldn't spend a little time, a little effort in developing a pilot or two in tracking the dropouts, in tracking what happens to our children when they carry through the school system or they leave the school system. Unless we start identifying the reasons in a very definitive way, unless we start identifying what's happening with the children – whether indeed they've dropped out of school, for what reason, where they've gone, what they're doing, do they come back into the school system later on – we really don't have an accurate handle to develop a process from. I would encourage that perhaps some effort be made to address the dropout situation by trying to find a better way, a better scheme of identifying the reasons for dropouts.

Getting back to the issue of funding, I think one of the solutions that was brought forward, as I mentioned, by the two opposition members was: throw more money at it. Last year I hired a researcher during the summer to do a little tracking of our own and basically found that funding doesn't necessarily achieve a great deal in the education system. The most successful high school in our constituency is indeed the one that's able to access the least funding, yet they have a 60 percent average

of people who go to postsecondary school. I think that is outstanding by any measure at any level of any school in Alberta, and still they are the least funded school by raising taxes and those types of efforts in all of the constituency. So just throwing money is not the solution. We have to have the dedication; we have to have the true efforts of all involved in order to achieve a successful result.

I note that \$5,400 is the average that is spent on educating a child in Alberta. When the minister has a moment, I wonder if he could perhaps clarify just what all it entails, what all goes into the \$5,400. Is it all capital expenditure? Is it all efforts that go into the education of all children at various levels until they reach the postsecondary level? So if perhaps at some time the minister could clarify that for me, I would appreciate it. I note also that it's fifth amongst provinces. Is this indeed a measure that's consistent? Do all the provinces use that consistent type of measure? So is that a true and fair assessment?

Dealing with distance learning, which is an effort that's very important to my area, being a rural depopulated area where we don't have large populations in any concentrated area, this is a very, very important asset to education and one that I encourage. It's new. It has had some glitches and still continues to have some glitches, but I feel that it is an excellent solution. I would certainly encourage the minister and his staff to work very, very hard to try and iron out the glitches that are there, because that is a very workable solution that can provide very high quality education to a rural depopulated area.

I want to compliment and commend the minister for the work that he's done regarding the Teachers' Retirement Fund. I think this is an issue that is of very much importance to a lot of people in this province. There are – what? – some 40,000 teachers in the province at the present time, and I think it's very important that we try and work together in resolving this thorny, thorny issue. I think it's fair to note that there isn't any one single group that's responsible for the situation that has been developing, and I certainly am pleased to see the apparent co-operation that is developing between the various groups that have to come together to help solve this dilemma.

Boundaries were addressed, and yes, I too agree that somewhere, somehow the boundaries issue is going to have to be addressed. We have an awful lot of nonoperative school boards who basically provide a questionable service to the education system, so if there is some way that we could rationalize this in a better manner, I would indeed encourage that to be done. However, I would also caution that it will not be a simple solution. It will not in many cases be a solution that boards will accept. So it's one that I would caution that if there is going to be an undertaking to redefine the boundaries, that there be a fair amount of caution displayed as well. I think the real effort and the real desire has to come from the constituents themselves. No government can come down and suggest that it has to be done from their perspective.

Exploring new sources of funding of course is very vital and very important, as I mentioned before. The Official Opposition really didn't have any solutions there. It is very interesting and it's very unfortunate, because it's easy to hammer away and say that we need more money, but we still need the solutions. Unfortunately, we have to keep working towards that. We have to develop some sort of a fair and equitable way. I was rather interested in the Member for Stony Plain who said that almost all the total payment from taxpayers is paid by the local taxpayer. I guess I have to ask the question, Mr. Minister: what portion does the local taxpayer pay? I was under the impression that the government was still paying in excess of 60 percent, and

if it's almost all that the local taxpayer is paying, 60 percent is a far cry from all. I'm rather surprised by that type of a statement.

9:20

As you know, I have a very keen interest in the development of the entrepreneurial education process. I think that's one that we must develop; I think it's probably the major focus in the education process in the world today. Countries throughout the world are keying on that particular aspect of education. Although it's new, there are truly some success stories that are coming forward in a very, very short time. As I mentioned when I brought forward Motion 204, the success rate in the state of Ohio: fully one-third of all new businesses that are developed are coming forward from students who have taken the entrepreneurial course in high school. I think that's an outstanding number; it's an outstanding achievement. Really, Ohio state has the longest record of entrepreneurial education, and they've been tracking now for 10 years. It's an area that I think can build. It's an area of education that can establish leaders rather than followers. We have absolutely no process in our education system today that trains a person to become a full-fledged businessperson. We have a compilation of various types of courses that can achieve that, but they're too fractured. What we really need is one major source of education that indeed will provide that, and the entrepreneurial process can achieve that.

It's unfortunate that the Official Opposition wouldn't allow Motion 204 to pass. I personally think it's one that would have benefited all of Alberta and one that all of Alberta needs. I was rather disappointed that the reason given by the opposition at the time was that it's going to cost too much. How can we possibly suggest that it costs too much to train our future generation to be leaders of our country? I really, really am shocked to hear that there are people who argue on that basis. The other argument, as I recall, was that the teachers won't have time. That's really unfortunate too, because if teachers don't have time to teach the basic skills and the basic needs of our children, then we're doing the wrong thing. I'm pleased to see the interest that the minister has shown in the development of this, and I feel confident that indeed we will have a full-fledged entrepreneurial type of process established in this province of Alberta.

Along with entrepreneurial education, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to see the development of perhaps a multitype diploma in high school, where a person can be better trained for his future education. This, of course, would have to tie in very significantly with the further education process, with the secondary education process. I think if we consider various types of diplomas that can better channel the skills of the students, we can probably achieve a higher grade and a higher level of education and proficiency amongst our students.

I would hope that we continue to expand our efforts to accommodate the increasing needs of the special ed type of institutions, and I refer to schools such as the Crystal Park school in Grande Prairie. I think that's a school that's providing a unique service not only in Alberta but for all of Canada and all of North America for that matter. I really want to compliment my colleague from Grande Prairie's school board for the excellent work they are providing, for the efforts, for the initiative in instituting such a fine institution in the province of Alberta. It's really one of a kind. It's really developing a true success story, and one that we should all be extremely proud of.

I think perhaps we're going to have to explore fuller utilization of our schools, whether it's using them 12 months of the year,

whether it's using them long hours. We can't afford the tremendous capital investment in the institutions we have developed with the minimum utilization that we have. From my perspective at least I think we have to encourage better utilization of the facilities we already have in place.

My colleague from Calgary-Bow is going to address some issues that I think are very important, and that is the reallocation of funding. I look forward to her comments in that particular area.

Just in closing, Mr. Chairman, again I would like to compliment the minister and his staff for the excellent work they have done in the development of the education process in the province. I want to wish them well; I want to wish them continued success.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by Calgary-Bow.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to take a few minutes this evening to speak about an important matter, a matter that's important to three important groups in this province: first of all, the taxpayers of Alberta; secondly, the retired teachers of Alberta; and thirdly, Alberta teachers who will someday be retired teachers in Alberta. That has to do with the Teachers' Retirement Fund and the pension liability to the province of that fund.

The most recent information we have available to us, Mr. Chairman, is at the end of March 1990. In the public accounts of the province can be found a note which indicates what that outstanding liability to the province is for the Teachers' Retirement Fund. Basically, it says:

An actuarial valuation at August 31, 1989 indicated that Teachers' Retirement Fund assets were insufficient by an amount of approximately \$2,393,600,000 to meet the liabilities of the fund.

Then it goes on to talk about the actuarial valuation based on different sets of assumptions from those that would govern the Alberta pension plan Acts, and that a separate actuarial evaluation indicates that the liability could be well over \$3 billion as of March 31, 1990.

Well, it's now 1991, Mr. Chairman. It's another year later, and there's no doubt in my mind that that pension liability has been growing and is even much more substantially larger than the note provided in the public accounts. How much it's grown we don't know, but we do know that this government has not taken any action that I'm aware of to address the problem. So just by letting it sit there and fester, the only thing it can do is grow.

No wonder teachers are concerned, because this unfunded pension liability creates important questions. Will there be enough money to pay benefits when people have retired? At the current time the Alberta government guarantees to meet half the pension payments. As I understand it, they guarantee to meet half the costs of these pensions. If there's this outstanding liability, will the government honour their guarantee? Then the whole question of increasing the benefits, Mr. Chairman: with this liability there's certainly not much of an incentive to increase the benefits as years go by so that inflation, which has had a devastating effect on people of fixed incomes, will also have its impact on teachers as they grow older too. Then, of course, there's the whole question about how well managed the Teachers' Retirement Fund really is. These are all important questions that need to be addressed, and as the Minister of Education is responsible for the Teachers' Retirement Fund, I

would hope he would take a few moments in his closing remarks to address them, because I didn't hear him spend much time in his opening remarks tonight.

9:30

The actuarial evaluations are likely correct, Mr. Chairman. In 20 years, plus or minus 10 or five years, depending on what happens, if there are no changes, the Teachers' Retirement Fund will be bankrupt, and by golly, 20 or 15 or 10 years can go by very, very quickly. Will the pensions be paid or guaranteed by the Alberta government at that point? If the fund is bankrupt, how will they be paid? For a teacher to be dependent on the whim of a government or the particular financial circumstances a government might find itself in in any given year is a pretty scary prospect. I mean, if you have anything to go on with the performance of this government here in recent years with high deficits and much debt, it's going to be a very scary prospect for a teacher to think that their pension payment might depend on a government being willing to pay that. Especially if it's difficult financial times, that is not any assurance or security at all for someone today. Also, if the fund is going to be bankrupt if nothing is done, then that certainly seems to rule out the possibility of increased benefits, which again has a devastating impact if those benefits aren't in any way indexed or responsive to the ravages of inflation.

So what are the solutions to the problem, Mr. Chairman? Who pays to solve the problem? How much do they pay? Well, there's no doubt in my mind that the teachers of this province are currently being prepared to be asked for higher contributions to the Teachers' Retirement Fund. That's no doubt going to be part of the solution. I know that the minister sent out letters, and we've discussed this previously in question period, where he indicates that in order to cover the benefits teachers would be required to pay 12 percent of their current salaries. Well, that certainly has the effect of shaking people up. I mean, 12 percent of your salary is going to fix up a pension plan. That's a pretty dramatic, radical solution. But I know what the effect will be when the minister comes along in a few months' time or a few years' time and says, "Well, let's only make it 7 or 8 percent." By golly, compared to 12 percent that looks reasonable by comparison. However, if we look at other public-sector pension plans, the figure is much lower, perhaps in the order of 4 and a half, 5, 5 and a half, or 6 . . .

MR. DINNING: Get your facts right, Bob.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: I do.

MR. DINNING: Get your facts right on that. I know they are not correct.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order.

MR. HAWKESWORTH: I have them right. I have them right.

Mr. Chairman, the question is: are these figures that the minister might end up proposing reasonable? Are they justifiable? That remains to be seen.

The question also has to be asked: should the responsibility for solving the problem rest entirely on teachers' shoulders? After all, this liability is a liability of the province of Alberta. The guarantee that's been given to the teachers to cover half the costs of their pension payments is a guarantee that's been given by the province of Alberta. So the government of Alberta has

a role to play, and they should not be looking solely to teachers to solve the problem.

Now, as a principle, Mr. Chairman, I believe that pension plans should achieve a number of objectives, generally speaking. They should be self-supporting. They should be professionally managed, and they should be professionally evaluated. They should also be actuarially sound, which the teachers' fund is not, and I believe a pension plan should have funds in place in order to provide benefits to employees when those pension benefits are required. Pension plans should be considered part of the terms of employment and part of the package of benefits offered so that when a person reaches their retirement years, they have the assurance that they will receive their pension payments. Now, whether it's necessary to start with a whole new plan in order to achieve these objectives or whether it's possible to reform the Teachers' Retirement Fund in order to meet these objectives, I don't know. That has to be part of the ongoing negotiations. Having said that, I have to emphasize that these principles that I've just mentioned must be the hallmark of any new arrangement that's made between the government and the teachers of this province.

Will increased contributions be necessary? Yes, I believe they will be. Should that happen now? Well, Mr. Chairman, if I were a teacher, I'd want to have some questions answered before turning over more money to this fund. Basically, those questions revolve around how well managed the Teachers' Retirement Fund is. The TRF reports on August 31 as its year-end, which makes it hard to compare to other funds in Canada and, I'm told, indeed in North America. In addition to that, there's generally a resistance, I find, with public pensions in this province. There's a resistance to public disclosure and evaluation. I know I can say with certainty that when it comes to the pension plans that are the responsibility of this government, that are administered and managed by this government, there is virtually no public disclosure of the assets of the pension fund. There's no disclosure of the investments, of the returns, of the valuations of those pension plans. As far as I know, whatever performance reviews are done are restricted to a small and behind-the-doors group. Certainly there's no widespread publication of those results, and I suspect the Teachers' Retirement Fund is not much different.

I have to again emphasize and remind the minister that it is the province that has guaranteed the shortfall. If this fund is not performing as well as it might, it's the taxpayers that carry the burden of that lack of performance, of that poor performance. It's the taxpayers on the hook to cover the difference. We have to be very, very concerned as a government and as taxpayers that the Teachers' Retirement Fund is well managed.

I'd like the minister to indicate, if he's prepared to and able to, what investment and rating services have reviewed the Teachers' Retirement Fund. Are they professionally competent, and are they widely used, if so? Are the reporting procedures standardized in order that the Teachers' Retirement Fund complies with the standard procedures of other pension plans in other provinces? It's one thing for a government to legislate what the private sector should do, especially when it comes to private-sector pensions; it's another thing for the public sector to take on those requirements for themselves. I'd like to know whether these reporting procedures are standardized in keeping with private-sector pension funds and the management of such funds. How well does the Teachers' Retirement Fund perform in relation to other plans? What are the guidelines that are given to the investment committee and other key managers of the Teachers' Retirement Fund? What assumptions do they use

to allocate their investments? What's their portfolio mix? What assumptions have they made to arrive at that portfolio mix, and what assumptions do they use to alter their portfolio mix?

These are crucial questions, Mr. Chairman, because if the fund is well managed, then it reduces the liability to the province and to the taxpayers. If it's not as well managed as it ought to be, then it just makes a problem a growing problem and much worse than it ought to be. I would also say that if the answers to these questions are solid and if it can be well demonstrated that this fund performs well in comparison to other pension plans, then the question and the issue of contributions to solve the problem become much, much easier, because at that point I don't believe teachers would have any problem willingly contributing more funds to solve the liability problem in the Teachers' Retirement Fund.

9:40

I would simply say, Mr. Chairman, to the Minister of Education – I know he's having his meetings with the ATA. More importantly, he has to convince his cabinet colleagues that this problem has to be addressed and dealt with and can't be ignored any longer and allowed to grow any longer. As part of that overall approach, I would suggest a number of recommendations that would help everyone on that side of the House begin addressing and solving the problems of the Teachers' Retirement Fund. First of all, a requirement for an independent performance review of the TRF. Secondly, timely reporting of the investments and the asset allocation of the TRF as well as their results, and on a regular basis this reporting take place in line with standards common throughout the pension industry. Thirdly, part of the review of the Teachers' Retirement Fund should be an evaluation or review of the roles of key players and the assumptions underlying the investment strategies of the management of the TRF.

At that point, Mr. Chairman, decisions can be made about contribution levels, about the contribution from the Alberta government, what kind of contribution that ought to be, and whether in order to require a higher contribution from the Alberta government to create a self-supporting fund, it would then be appropriate to continue to provide an ongoing guarantee. Certainly the whole question about whether a new fund ought to be established or whether reforms to the TRF are the way to go can also be made at that point.

If such an evaluation were to take place along the lines that I've proposed, Mr. Chairman, I believe everyone could be satisfied that there was a sound foundation under the Teachers' Retirement Fund, and all three critical groups in the province – those being the taxpayers, retired teachers, and teachers who will someday be retired – can rest assured that this fund and the decisions that were being taken were in their interests collectively.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Member for Calgary-Bow.

MRS. B. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed a privilege to speak this evening to the Minister of Education's estimates. I would like to congratulate the minister for his concern and his care for education of young Albertans. Through his endeavours and those of this government, education has continued to remain a priority. In fact, instead of cuts during these economically troubled times, there have been modest, responsible increases in spending in Education: 6.6 percent or about \$108 million, bringing the funding to over \$1.7 billion or

about \$3,600 per child attending school. This continues to remain a priority.

This minister has shown that he listens to his constituents. When the school boards of this province said it was essential to know the capital program to plan for several years in order to make better efficient use of their resources, this minister came up with a five-year plan for a capital support program of \$700 million. This announcement by the minister made long-term planning possible so the boards could make more efficient use of the resources. People now know when a new school will be built, and it has helped to alleviate some of the concerns that parents have had from not knowing. I know both the Calgary boards appreciated this initiative which was announced by the minister. Two of the schools in Calgary-Bow will benefit under the modernization program. Both Kensington and Madeleine d'Houet schools will be rejuvenated under the program. This will help to add much to the older community, which is itself being rejuvenated as younger families begin to move in.

The challenge of equity funding received much attention across the province. Many of the stakeholders of education have spent many months searching for a solution to the inequities. The minister has promised to listen and to work with the stakeholders to find a solution. Many boards, including the two school boards of Calgary, do not agree with the education trust fund or corporate pooling concept. It is the hope of all that a reasonable solution will be able to be worked out, given sufficient time to accomplish this. We have the minister's promise that a collaborative solution will be found, and I'm confident that this promise will be kept.

Teachers' pensions have been a concern to the minister, to teachers, and to our government. I know the minister is working with the ATA to find a solution to this challenge. Mr. Minister, what steps have been taken so far to find the solution to the pension concerns? What time line do you foresee for the pension fund to be stabilized? It was encouraging to see the 7 percent increase in funding for this pension, and we both look forward to finding a solution to this challenge.

During the past months the minister has instituted a review of special education. The committee has completed the first stage of their review, and their report is now out for discussion by stakeholders and the public. It's time to evaluate what we want our teaching staffs to do. Educators are not trained medical staff, and we must not be holding out expectations for them which are inappropriate. More in-service is necessary to prepare teachers to teach children with disabilities. As the number of children with disabilities increases due to modern medical advances, more resources will be necessary to ensure that a high level of achievement for all students is maintained in schools.

I was pleased to see the 3.6 percent increase for English as a Second Language. Much more is necessary to meet all the needs in the school systems of today. More support for immigrant children must be forthcoming from the federal government to help address part of this need. Will the government plan to access more funds or to take steps to try and access more funds for this?

There is a need to ensure that costs which are not strictly educational, such as lunch programs, should be recovered from other departments, such as Family and Social Services. Children need these services to learn. They cannot learn if they're hungry or cold, but these services must come from the proper area and not from Education funds.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that achievement testing at year three is not necessary and is unproductive. I have maintained that belief; I'm sorry. The temptation to teach to the test is

overwhelming at times, and this leads to an uneven education, with one subject receiving priority one year and another subject the next year. Perhaps this would be an area where some costs could be saved.

This is a government that believes in education. The future of Alberta depends on our students of today. We must have the skills to meet the many challenges of our future. This time of constant change is just beginning. The minister and this government have shown their commitment to keeping education a high priority through this budget, and I congratulate him.

Thank you.

9:50

MR. DINNING: Mr. Chairman, as the evening draws closer to midnight, which I'm sure all members would want to move to, I'd like to take this opportunity to respond to some of the comments that have been made. I certainly appreciate the laudatory and supportive comments from all members who have spoken this evening supportive of our efforts in education. I want to go to some of the questions and comments that were made.

I find it interesting that the Member for Stony Plain would certainly talk about our share of funding and always uses the old rhubarb of 90-10 in the good old days, it now being in the order of 60 provincial, 40 local. I should remind the hon. member that he might go back in history that is more reflective of his teaching career and look back at, say, 1941, when the local taxpayers paid as much as 85 percent of the cost of education. Today they only pay 40 percent. Go back to 1911, Mr. Chairman, when local taxpayers paid for 92 percent of the cost of education. I always find it interesting that hon. members use those good old comments. But I go back to the point I made earlier, that this budget reflects in the order of 1.7 billion Alberta taxpayers' dollars, and that is a significant investment by Albertans in a quality education system in this province.

Interesting comments from the members for Calgary-McKnight and for Stony Plain on equity. The hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight actually admitted that she doesn't have a solution. So did the Member for Stony Plain acknowledge that they don't have a solution to the equity problem. Clearly, there is a problem, Mr. Chairman. They're all glad to talk about the problem, but typical, typical opposition critic thinking, they haven't come up with one measly suggestion on how we ought to deal with the problem. One of the things that one of the members said was that you can't solve the equity problem until you solve the boundary problem, but at the same time, don't take away their autonomy. Don't touch school boards' autonomy. Find somebody to find a solution, but don't touch their autonomy.

Well, when it comes to boundaries, the hon. members are telling this minister that someone on high, someone in Edmonton, some royal commission or other kind of commission, ought to tell school boards how they ought to merge their operations and make them more efficient. Well, if they're so autonomous, and if they should be so autonomous in the hon. member's thinking, I would suggest that those school boards take the initiative, just as some school boards in this province have had that opportunity, have been encouraged by some government members to create those efficiencies. But "No; don't make us efficient in our backyard; we're just fine; go after the other guys," they suggest. "Leave our autonomy alone; go deal with somebody else's autonomy." Those are the two edges of the sword, the other edge of the sword that the hon. member is

forgetting about when he cries for all this autonomy and at the same time calls for a boundaries review.

Mr. Chairman, I know the concern expressed by members with respect to changes in the bureaucracy. I only want to remind the hon. Member for Stony Plain of his illustrious great helmsman's comments with respect to reducing the size of the bureaucracy in the Department of Education. I go back to a forum that I participated in with Mr. Martin on Thursday, February 1, 1990, in the great city of Calgary at Central Memorial high school, where he said: in the Department of Education I think there is a few bureaucrats – sic – that can be cut there. Then cut them, said the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order please.

Point of order, Member for Stony Plain?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Citation?

MR. WOLOSHYN: *Beauchesne* whatever you want.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just a moment. Order. Order.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I would like to clarify something.

Chairman's Ruling Points of Order

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order, everybody. Sit down, please. Order. Sit, please. [interjections] Also the minister.

Order please. I respectfully request that all members retain their places just for the moment. If there is a point of order, our rules require the quotation of citations and so forth. We should not use a point of order in order to make a complaint. So let us proceed.

Is there a point of order, hon. Member for Stony Plain?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Not yet.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, still proceed.

Debate Continued

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Chairman, in taking that member's advice and in fact taking all members' and all Albertans' advice that government has got to get its fiscal house in order, the Department of Education cannot be immune to some of those reductions. Those are people, and there is no joy in taking those qualified professionals, those qualified public servants, and asking them to be reassigned to other duties or to find other employment. But I should remind hon. members that the Department of Education's staff complement today, in 1991-92, is precisely the same staff complement that existed in the Department of Education in 1971-72. We have gone high, but we have now gone back to some 637 permanent positions, as are outlined in this budget, and those are exactly the same number as we had in this budget in 1971-72.

Mr. Chairman, members asked about the breakdown in volume and growth. As members know, there is a grant rate component to our budget, and there's an enrollment component. We expect that in 1991-92 we'll see about a 2.3 percent or nearly 10,000 new students entering our schools on September 1, 1991, as compared to the previous year, and that accounts for nearly \$61 million in the additional expenditure. As well, the grant rate, annualized from April 1, 1991, through to March 31, 1992,

requires an additional \$44 million, and that was the number that the hon. Member for Stony Plain was looking for.

A commitment re community schools. The commitment is there, Mr. Chairman. We have increased our funding this year to \$78,700 and change to each as a minimum to community schools around this province. Will we continue with the funding? The answer is yes.

High needs funding, high needs schools. I appreciate the laudatory comments from my colleagues from Calgary and from Stony Plain in that here we are, really, in the 18th month of that pilot program in Calgary and Edmonton, and those high needs funds, some \$2.6 million – \$920,000 to Edmonton public, \$522,000 to Edmonton Catholic, \$806,000 to Calgary public, and \$350,000 to Calgary Catholic – are being spent in a way that is designed by those school boards. They're looking at the development of language skills, they're looking at improving children's self-esteem, they're looking at trying to improve the satisfaction with schooling by students in those schools, looking at improvement in behaviour and attendance, and looking at greater rates of students staying on and fewer students dropping out. Mr. Chairman, for an assessment we have agreed with those four school boards that a thorough review would take place at the end of the third year of the pilot project, which is in the next school year.

Mr. Chairman, language policy, especially as it relates to English as a Second Language. I appreciate the comments of all of my colleagues. This year we have increased our funding for English as a Second Language for new Canadians to the tune of \$722 per student, with a commitment that that funding is in place for three years. With the growing number of new Canadians coming to our school system, that has resulted in about a 9 percent increase in our language grants, especially as they relate to English as a Second Language. I appreciate the comments by my colleagues about Alberta-born children who are in need of English as a Second Language. Remember that the funding that exists in our schools now, about \$2,200 or \$2,400 for an SFPF grant plus an additional \$1,000 plus or minus per student, is already there as well. On top of that comes the \$722 per student, and I believe that is funding that is suitable, that is satisfactory. What we've asked school boards to do is work with us to figure out: how could you use those dollars, those resources even better? No sense in putting a child into a physics 10 class or a science class if he or she doesn't understand the English language. Clearly, there have got to be, and I believe there are, better ways to invest those dollars in English-language training.

10:00

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight's comment. She said that our education system is very, very good. Those comments are appreciated by all of those who are in the school system.

Teacher shortage: a legitimate concern. Have we provided permanent certificates to any unqualified teachers? The answer is an absolute no. We have issued no permanent teaching certificates to teachers who lack the necessary credentials or qualifications.

The hon. member asked about conflict of interest for trustees; define it. It is defined, Mr. Chairman. It is in the School Act, and we will abide by what the Legislature has passed in the School Act.

Use of the School Act for the creation of minority religious school districts: a concern that is felt by many of my colleagues in this Assembly. I think of the hon. Member for Bow Valley,

the hon. Member for Little Bow, and the Member for Cypress-Redcliff especially, these days facing the creation of new school districts. I do have to express the concern publicly, Mr. Chairman: are the School Act and the provisions in the School Act to create those religious minority school districts being used properly? I am in the process of seeking some legal advice, because it is quite proper that school districts should be formed where – in most cases in this province Catholics are in the minority; they have that unalienable constitutional right to establish those school districts, and I will support them. I will go a long ways to support that provision in the School Act. But if in any way it is abused or not properly used, then I have a concern, and I am in the process of seeking some legal advice on that matter.

Mr. Chairman, I've talked about the comments by the members on equity and the boundary review.

Native education. Mr. Chairman, I won't go into all of the lengths that this province is going to in native education, except to say this. There is not one other province in this country that is doing as much as Alberta is to develop and preserve native languages in our schools. When I look at what native bands and school boards are doing with provincial assistance across this province, what they've developed in the way of Cree curriculum or Sarcee language development, the Blackfoot culture being promoted, the work that's being done by more than 56 school boards across the province in the whole native education project, I am surprised by the hon. Member for Calgary-McKnight's comments that we are somehow falling behind. It's acknowledged, and educators are coming from all parts of this country to find out what we are doing in this province. When I look at our curriculum and the fact that in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 the native language, the native culture, the native history is part of the core curriculum in this province, then I am amazed. I am amazed by what the hon. member has had to say in a press release that I've read of hers today and in comments that she's made in this Assembly before.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to comment on the hon. Member for Smoky River's comments and concern about dropout rates. We are concerned about that. We have a long ways to go to be satisfied that we are doing all we can do to make sure kids get a quality education and stay in school to get the tools they need in their toolbox to be successful in whatever they choose to do outside of school. I look at our efforts in the integrated occupational program, our efforts in special education programs to keep those kids in schools, to help them to get the skills that they need in special education, our guidance and counseling services, including the career and life management course, our co-operative education work experience and our practical arts program, our high needs programs in Calgary and Edmonton, the distance learning project in the 150 schools across the province that I mentioned in my earlier remarks, and the native education project. But we've gone one step further in working with the federal government in their whole stay-in-school initiative. They are involved, by my count, in nearly 20 schools, working in partnership with the Department of Education and the Canadian Employment and Immigration people to make sure that there are projects that are available and that funding is available where schools and school boards want to take on the responsibility of eliminating and moving to eliminate the unnecessarily high dropout rates in this province.

One idea that has come to me of late is that maybe you should try a pilot, maybe you should suggest to one school board that for every child, every student that's going to drop out of school, there must be an exit interview. There must be a

discussion with that student as to why he or she is leaving and what that school is going to do to stop that reason from happening. Maybe that report ought to end up on the minister's or the deputy minister's desk to know exactly what that school board has done, how it has exhausted all the possibilities to ensure that that child has stayed in school.

Mr. Chairman, we got into the special education discussion. Let me just focus on integration. That is something that I have advocated. The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is a strong advocate for it, and so am I. When we talk about integration, we're not talking simply about plunking down into a classroom on an already burdened down teacher with enough to do, just simply laying on that teacher and putting into that classroom, three or four or five or seven more special education students. With the integration of students must come the integration of resources, dollars, and people and also must come the integration of programs. Whether they are FCSS-funded programs, whether they're Department of Health or Department of Family and Social Services programs, all of those professionals must be sitting around a table working together as part of an education team, focusing on the needs of that one child. There is no reason on God's green Earth why there should be a child in the city of Calgary who is touched by as many as 22 separate social agencies, including the school, and none of them talk to one another. Either by law, by turf protection, or by convention they're not allowed to or they won't talk to one another. That is inexcusable in this province. This government must do all that it can to break down those barriers, break down those walls, so that those people work together and focus their attention and efforts on that child.

Mr. Chairman, there was concern about the distance learning project, and I just ask the hon. member to remember that distance learning funding for the operation of the distance learning project is in fact going up. The base rate for a distance learning school goes from \$35,200 this year to \$36,500 next year. The amount of funding per credit goes up as well, so that the funding is available to those schools who want to enhance their distance learning delivery. We no longer need all of the expensive equipment because that was purchased in the previous fiscal years. Now our focus is on operational funding, and it is there for those school boards who want to take up and take on the responsibility.

Mr. Chairman, just some brief remarks in closing. I would ask the hon. member to think about her comments about expensive testing, expensive student evaluation. When I think about \$7 million in a \$1.7 billion budget or a \$2.5 billion education system, I'd say that \$7 million is a minuscule amount of money to assess the progress of our students, to focus not just on testing for the sake of testing, but to assist teachers to improve the quality of their teaching, to improve the quality of their delivery. That \$7 million is focused on achievement testing, on diploma examination, but it's also focused on diagnostic testing, on language testing to detect how well a child is progressing in the language curriculum, and if he's not, through these diagnostic tests we can assess how well or whether that child is progressing and then take remedial action to bring that child along to where he or she can be or should be. In the same way, we analyze the results. We go back to those schools and go back to those teachers to help them to improve the quality of their teaching.

10:10

Mr. Chairman, I'm appalled that the hon. member would suggest that we're spending too much. We've heard from the

ATA, who have done an evaluation with their teachers, who put a pretty high rating on the student evaluation that we do, and they are in general agreement that achievement testing and diploma examinations should continue and that they value the input and the analysis that come from those tests to improve the quality of their teaching.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to comment lastly – there are several areas that hon. members have mentioned, but in the interests of time, the Teachers' Retirement Fund. I want to make it clear once again, because perhaps he is unable to listen or he is unwilling to read *Hansard*, where I have made it clear for the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View that teachers are willing to pay their fair share in the costs of their pensions, to secure their pensions, those who are retired today and those who will retire in the future. The fact is that the hon. member knows full well that the existing cost of providing pension benefits is the equivalent of 12 percent of salary, 12 percent of the total payroll for teachers of this province. The province is contributing 6 percent of the cost of those pensions. The fact is that teachers are not; they've acknowledged that, and they've acknowledged they have a responsibility to pay more.

As members in this Assembly know, I've shared with the president of the ATA our express desire to enter into negotiations and discussions with the ATA regarding steps that can be taken to place the fund on a more financially stable footing and to ensure its continued status as a registered pension plan. Those discussions have begun, and they will continue. They will focus on maintaining our registration under the Income Tax Act of Canada. They will focus on increasing employee contribution rates. They will focus on making provision for employer contributions. They'll focus on cost-of-living adjustments, and they'll focus on the unfunded liability and how we are going to come to grips with that problem.

Now, as for the hon. member's criticisms of how the fund is administered, how it's invested, I'd suggest he go and have a chat with the Alberta Teachers' Association, who in partnership with the government are managing the fund. They effectively have an awful lot of say over how that fund is administered. I know the hon. member receives the *ATA News*. I see the editor of the *ATA News* here tonight in the gallery, and I welcome her to watch these discussions. In the December 3, 1990, *ATA News* was the annual report of the board of administrators of the Teachers' Retirement Fund. All of his questions have been answered. If he has further ones, then I would refer him to the board of administrators of the Teachers' Retirement Fund.

Mr. Chairman, I thank hon. members for their contribution to this debate. I welcome their ongoing contribution in the question period and further motions, and in the interest of time, I would move that the committee rise and report.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The motion is to rise and report, hon. minister? Fine.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Education, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report and the request for leave to sit again?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HORSMAN: Mr. Speaker, before moving for adjournment, I would draw the attention of all of the members of the Assembly that in the hour and three quarters still available to us, for those of us of English origin, to celebrate Saint George's

Day, that today in fact is Saint George's Day and to draw attention of hon. members to the crest of our province, which is surmounted by the cross of Saint George. On that particular note, in order to allow members time to celebrate that occasion, I now move that we adjourn until tomorrow.

[At 10:16 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 2:30 p.m.]