

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 24, 1994**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 94/03/24

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

head: Prayers

MR. SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance.

Amen.

head: Presenting Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition from 60 citizens mainly of Edmonton-Gold Bar requesting and urging "the Government to maintain the Grey Nuns Hospital in Mill Woods as a Full-Service, Active" treatment hospital.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 193 seniors asking the Government not to alter funding arrangements for . . . Seniors Lodges and . . . Subsidized Apartments until Seniors have been consulted and have agreed to any revisions.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MR. ZARIWNY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a petition signed by 162 Belgravia home and school association parents asking that the government "reconsider its proposed cuts to education."

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition on behalf of the students at Viscount Bennett high school, an extended education program in Calgary-Currie. The petition has 468 signatures, and they are asking the provincial government to assist them with their financial restructuring and give them "time to restructure and locate alternative financing" if necessary in the process of this restructuring.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

MR. COLLINGWOOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on March 14 respecting the Grey Nuns hospital and keeping it as an active care facility now be read and received.

CLERK:

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to maintain the Grey Nuns Hospital in Mill Woods as a Full-Service, Active Hospital and continue to serve the south-east end of Edmonton and surrounding area.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented on March 15 containing 1,104 names of seniors please be read and received at this time.

CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government not to alter funding arrangements for Alberta's Seniors Lodges and Seniors Subsidized Apartments until Seniors have been consulted and have agreed to any revisions to funding arrangements.

head: Notices of Motions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise now to give notice that I shall rise again at the appropriate time to ask the Assembly to deal with the following motion:

Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize the outstanding achievements of Wayne Gretzky becoming the NHL all-time leading goal scorer.

A wonderful event.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table today with the Assembly the annual report for Alberta Health for the year ended March 31, 1993, and the Alberta health care insurance plan statistical supplement for the same period. Copies of each document will be distributed to all members.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to table the annual report of the Alberta Water Resources Commission for the year ended March 31, 1993, and everybody will receive a copy.

DR. L. TAYLOR: I'm pleased to present to the House and table in the House the annual report of the Alberta Research Council.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table copies of a letter to Premier Klein from the Concerned Seniors of South Edmonton indicating that they view the recommendations concerning seniors' cuts "with extreme concern bordering on panic."

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I too have a letter which I would like to file four copies of in the Assembly today and which appears to suggest that the Assembly has been seriously misled by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. The letter is from the president of the Canadian Polish Youth Friendship Society of Edmonton and refers to the letter filed by the Liberal MLA from Edmonton-Centre which is sessional paper 870/94. It says, although I won't quote it but just in filing, that the letter was misused, that the content of the letter which was filed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre and its intention were taken out of context by the presenter, that the 350 petition letters which were attached to the letter were not from their source, that the society had not written any additional letters, and that it is a fallacy that the society was awaiting response from the Premier to 1,500 other letters. This letter suggests that that presentation by the Member for Edmonton-Centre was a fallacy and seriously misleading the House. I'd like to file this today.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to rise and introduce to you and through you eight Alberta pioneers who have seen it all as far as Alberta history is concerned. I speak of the Raging Grannies, led by Louise Swift and supported by Betty Mardiros, Julie Kowbel, Laura Fisher, Helen Melnychuk, Jean Rogers, Melanie Biro, and Evelyn Tomlinson. They are in the public gallery, and I'd like to ask them to please stand and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

MRS. MIROSH: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Meng Qingxiang, vice-president of the Heilongjiang Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. Mr. Meng is also a senior economic advisor to the Heilongjiang government. He is accompanied by a delegation of 13, but I understand six of the delegation are here with him in the Legislature. Mr. Meng and his delegation are visiting Alberta to study Alberta's fiscal and taxation policy and to develop policies on economics, science, and technology. While in Alberta the delegation will be meeting with government officials and the business community. During the Premier's trip to Asia last year the Premier and vice-governor of Heilongjiang reviewed the impressive level of co-operation between the two provinces in areas such as oil and gas, animal husbandry, scientific research, education, and sports, and they also discussed future areas of commercial co-operation. I would like to ask Mr. Meng and his party to rise – they are seated in the members' gallery – and receive the recognition of the Assembly. Would you please rise.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly 37 grades 7 and 8 students from the Erle Rivers school in my hometown of Milk River. These students are accompanied by two teachers Marj Cronkhite and Brian Aman, along with parents Dennis Ellert, Ron Minion, Lois Spitzer, Jan Bellew, Lynda Pike, and Alan Garber. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and the rest of the members of the Assembly two lovely ladies seated up there. These ladies have to claim responsibility for me being here in the Legislature. I'd like to introduce to the Assembly Marsha Erb, president of Calgary-West constituency, and Casey MacDonald, treasurer of the Calgary-West Constituency Association. I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. HEWES: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Bill Daly, who's a great friend of seniors in the entire province of Alberta and the nation. Mr. Daly is the president of Pensioners

Concerned for Alberta. He's in the public gallery, and I'd ask members to acknowledge his presence.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly 13 junior high students from Wrentham. They are seated in the public gallery along with their teachers Holly Godson and Gillian Vas, parents Allan Jones and James Wightman. I would like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mayfield.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature two English as a Second Language groups in our city that are at AVC, a government agency that provides that service to our citizens. Mr. Ady, you should take a little note. There are 12 students in one class and 13 from another. Elke Siebels is a teacher of one group accompanying these fine students, and Albert Penner the other. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

**head: Statement by the Speaker
Parliamentary Behaviour**

MR. SPEAKER: Before proceeding with Oral Question Period, the Chair feels compelled to make some comments to members following yesterday's something that could be characterized as a question period. We need to revisit some fundamental principles.

First, the Speaker does not sit in judgment of the truthfulness of statements made in this Assembly. Parliament involves using the process of orderly debate to bring facts to light, to put differing viewpoints and positions forward. Disagreements regarding facts and differing versions of facts are to be expected. It is up to members to put their side forward in debate, thereby persuading other members and ultimately the voters as to the soundness of their views.

In this Assembly all members are taken to always speak the truth because no parliament is able to judge the accuracy of every word uttered. The use of words such as lie, liar, or deceive are unparliamentary because in and of themselves they accomplish nothing, just as children on a playground shouting "liar" at each other accomplishes nothing. In those rare cases where the Assembly has been intentionally deceived, a question of privilege including a question of contempt would arise.

Second, drowning out questions and responses that do not find favour with one side or the other does not accomplish anything and brings this Assembly into disrepute. Comments from the public indicate that they are not impressed by such behaviour. Quite the opposite. Hurling insults and abuse at other members does not impress anyone either. There are elected bodies in the world where such behaviour is common. There are also elected bodies in the world where fistfights break out. This has never been the case in Alberta, and as far as this Speaker is concerned, it never will be the case.

If the preservation of orderly, rational, intelligent debate requires the Chair to name members, the Chair is prepared to do so. The Chair will be guided in this by the action of the members, whom the Chair is here to serve.

head: Oral Question Period
Gainers Inc.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, as part of the tangled web of the Gainers financing the Alberta Treasury Branches became a 50 percent participant in a \$28 million loan from the National Bank of Paris. An internal Treasury Branch memo states that there was no obvious source of repayment of these moneys other than proceeds from the liquidation of Gainers. No banking institution would lend money on that kind of security unless they were forced. Mr. Premier, other than direct political strong-arming, why did the Treasury Branch risk \$14 million of taxpayers' moneys when it knew that it would lose its shirt in the deal?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the details of the whole Gainers situation have been tabled appropriately by the Provincial Treasurer. I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that it was this government that asked for the inquiry so that we could have full disclosure. Relative to the details that are contained in the numerous documents that were filed by the hon. Provincial Treasurer, I will have him supplement.
 Thank you.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, it was this government that got us into the pork business.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier agree to release all of the documents that pertain to the Treasury Branch involvement in this Gainers fiasco?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, to correct the hon. member, it is this government that got us out of the pork business. We filed in the Assembly earlier in the session the master agreement relating to Gainers. Yesterday we released, as the Premier said, some 10 pounds of documents associated with the Burns acquisition of Gainers Inc. and Gainers Properties. We have the Auditor General's report that does a comprehensive review of the finances of the arrangement. The facts are there. The facts speak for themselves. The facts say something loud and clear, and that is that the government should not be in the business of business, and that is why under the leadership of the Premier of this province this government is getting out of the business of business and leaving it in the hands of business, where it belongs.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that winks and nudges got the Treasury Branch into this Gainers fiasco. Tell Albertans, Mr. Premier, why the Treasury Branches would risk \$14 million of taxpayers' moneys on this kind of a fiasco?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the hon. member wants to continue to look in the past. We have laid out the documentation before members of the Assembly. We've filed the documents, which has virtually never been done before, about the deal between Gainers and Burns: the master agreement a couple of weeks ago, the Auditor General's report of yesterday.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that it was this government that has taken the people of Alberta, the taxpayers of Alberta out of the pork business. They're not involved with Gainers any longer, nor should they be. It just underscores once again that this government should not be in the business of business.

1:50

MR. DECORE: Mr. Speaker, they took us out of the business just like they took us out of magnesium and pork and lamb and telephones and everything else that went wrong. Cookies.

Mr. Speaker, between October 1992 and January 1994, when Gainers was sold, this government paid \$581,000 to Ernst & Young to have Ian Strang run Gainers. During the same time Gainers lost some 40 million dollars; that's \$69 in losses for every dollar paid to the manager. Mr. Premier, you were the Premier during most of this time. It's not then and now. Most of the time you were Premier. Why didn't you roll back that exorbitant management fee?

MR. KLEIN: Well, the press asked that question much more eloquently yesterday.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Did you answer it?

MR. KLEIN: Yeah. The simple answer is that we were intent, really very intent on selling that company and getting it off our back and at the same time keeping people employed in this city and providing an opportunity for northern hog producers to have access to a processing plant and access to export markets. Mr. Speaker, our sole objective was to really put that plant into the hands of private enterprise, where it rightfully belongs and where it rightfully is now.

MR. DECORE: Well, the Premier I guess didn't hear the question. The Premier says that \$350,000 is an obscene salary. How do you justify your paying this manager \$435,000 for a year?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the services of Ernst & Young were acquired to manage the operation of the plant but, more importantly, to find a way of getting the plant back into the private sector's hands. We think now that that has been done, the right decision has been made. The facts are on the table today. The Premier said it very well: our whole focus was not on the management of the plant, not on the day-to-day management of the plant; it was where it rightfully belonged, on trying to get that plant back into the private sector, fully up and operational so that it would continue to be a viable operation.

When we came down to November 18, we were faced with two choices. We were faced with going with the Burns offer or with the bankruptcy opportunity. Fortunately for the workers at Gainers, we chose the Burns option, because the hon. members across the way were advocating another option, which would have meant bankruptcy and would have meant 1,200 people on the streets of Alberta.

MR. DECORE: Mr. Premier, how can you justify rolling back the benefits on seniors and forcing rollbacks on nurses and others and not do anything about this exorbitant fee? How can you justify that?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I simply have to reiterate that notwithstanding the fees that were being paid at that particular time, that were contracted by Mr. Pocklington when he was the owner of Gainers, our sole purpose was to get out of the business of being in this particular business, the business of hog and at one time cattle processing. The fundamental point is that this government asked for this report. These people wouldn't be asking the questions they are now if it weren't for the honesty and the openness and the straightforwardness of this particular government. What we have done is we have provided them, we have handed them the ammunition. You know why? Because we want to be open and we want to be honest, and that's the way we are.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Auditor General told Albertans that the former chief executive officer of Gainers received a \$650,000 golden handshake. Now we find out that the deal between Burns and this government includes a clause under which seven managers will receive unreduced pension benefits, but the rest of the employees won't. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. Why are these seven managers being treated special while the hourly workers are not?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would have to ask the question of the Gainers management as well as the Burns management. As far as I'm concerned, the pension arrangement that was available to Gainers employees before the agreement is still in place after the agreement. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The hon. Opposition House Leader will please keep quiet during question period unless he's recognized by the Chair. [interjections] That definitely applies to both sides, but it takes two. [interjections] Order.

If the hon. member can ask a supplemental question without continuing after the question is asked, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper may do so.

Gainers Inc. (continued)

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, full accountability means nothing if the schedules aren't there. Schedule . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. member knows about the rules about preambles for supplemental questions.

MR. CHADI: My question now, Mr. Speaker, is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, who in cabinet authorized unreduced pension benefits to these seven managers? Who?

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the member across the way was flashing something up there for theatrics. I'd like to see him be a bit more specific. What he's saying is that he would have preferred that this Assembly receive information on individual Gainers employees including their personal information. That's not something that we believe is right for those individuals. That may be the Liberal way of doing things, but that is not the way that we're going to do business over here.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

MR. CHADI: Mr. Speaker, my second supplementary.

MR. SPEAKER: Excuse me. The Speaker lost track of the supplementals.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That almost gave me a heart attack, like the \$209 million losses in Gainers. Run for cover, boys. Run for cover. You can hide. You can . . .

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order. The Chair is going to serve fair notice that comments before questions on supplementals are going to result in the loss of the question. That is the notice.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

Gainers Inc. (continued)

MR. CHADI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How much in pension benefits and severances are Alberta taxpayers forking out to these managers? Tell us.

MR. DINNING: Mr. Speaker, the information is in the material that was filed in the Assembly yesterday. I would direct the hon. member that if he wishes, he could choose to ask that question of the Burns company.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

Crow Benefit

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since its introduction in 1985 the Alberta Crow benefit offset program has worked very successfully in offsetting distortions in Alberta feed grain prices caused by the current method of payment of the federal Crow benefit. Can the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development outline the benefits that producers and the Alberta economy have derived from this program?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

2:00

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The exact amount of money is \$450 million.

MR. COUTTS: Why has the decision been made to end the program as of March 31 of this year then, Mr. Speaker?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The decision is consistent with the policies that we have adopted, particularly with our three-year plan. It's consistent with the arrangements that were signed with the GATT agreement and some of the requirements that are going to come forward from the GATT agreement, and that basically is that commodity-specific types of safety net programs are no longer going to be accepted. Indeed, this is a commodity-specific type of program, and therefore we have chosen to phase out of it.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then what would be the process towards winding down the operations of the offset program?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a two-phase process in that indeed there are those who buy the feed and there are those who provide their own feed, grow their own feed, and feed their own feed. There are two parts to this: for those that grow their own feed and feed their own animals, the cut-off date will be March 31, and those that buy the feed will have an extended period of May 31. Hopefully, in the process the grain certificates will have to be sent in by the end of June.

The major reason that we have chosen to withdraw from this program is that the emphasis of the program was to change the distortions of the method of payment, or the Crow benefit. Indeed, with the signing of GATT, where there was an arrangement made that 36 percent of the financial benefit would have to

be removed from the program, we felt that that indeed would be incentive enough to make the arrangements workable.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MLA Pensions

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is breaking contracts with seniors, health care workers, teachers, and public-sector workers, while former Tories responsible for nine consecutive budgets and a \$30 billion debt are collecting \$36 million in obscene lifetime benefits from taxpayers. There is no fairness. Will the Premier explain why he is allowing his former colleagues to grab fat pensions while everyone else is being cut and cut and cut?

MR. KLEIN: There are a few in that caucus there who are eligible for those fat pensions, as well, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member would probably be delighted to know that I don't get a fat pension and neither does he. Doesn't it make him feel good?

MR. DALLA-LONGA: No answer to the question.
You've asked teachers, health care workers . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

MR. SPEAKER: Order. That is not the format for supplemental questions, hon. member.

MR. DALLA-LONGA: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the hon. Premier: he's asked teachers, health care workers, and public-sector employees to take a minimum of 5 percent . . . [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. member, fair warning was given by the Chair when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper was giving preambles. The hon. member has had ample opportunity to recast his questions to get them into proper format.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Home Schooling

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Education's three-year business plan places a great deal of importance on performance measures and accountability standards. Last September discussions were held across the province with home schoolers and stakeholder groups dealing with a variety of issues, including assessment of students. Could the Minister of Education please advise the House of the outcome of these discussions?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Education.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Certainly those discussions did take place, and the overall outcome could be fairly described as follows. First of all, there was a divergence of opinion on the part of home schoolers as to whether or not there should be an overall system of assessment or not, but the more specific outcome, I think, was that the majority of home schoolers, yes, are very interested in the achievement of their students and would want there to be an assessment system in place. However, they are concerned that the assessment vehicle or the test that is used be curriculum neutral and concentrate on skills and the essential understandings that they need to know rather than a particular background of material.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the government planning to legislate a system of assessment upon home schooled children?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, ultimately it will be necessary to provide in regulations related to legislation a provision with respect to assessment, as it is for students in the province. However, it's very important to note here that we did commit to the circulation of the draft regulations to home schoolers prior to any specific regulations being put in place. That commitment is there, and we'll be following it.

MR. DOERKSEN: Could the minister indicate when he anticipates the consultation on the regulations will take place?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think I understand the direction of the member's supplementary question in that it has been some time since those initial consultations took place. We'll make every effort to get those draft regulations out as soon as possible, very soon, so that the final stages of this process can be completed.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont.

Senior Citizens' Programs

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has lots of money for Gainers but not much for seniors. The Premier tells seniors that threshold levels are flexible. Meanwhile, the Minister of Community Development tells seniors that if threshold levels increase, then other seniors' programs are reduced. To the Premier: as the threshold levels change, will seniors have to give up benefits in some other area? Is it dollar for dollar?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to remind the hon. member that almost a billion dollars – a billion dollars – will be going to seniors. The point of the exercise of the Minister of Community Development and the hon. chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council, the object of that exercise is to find out from the seniors what is right for them. We have put out some proposals. We're going through the consultation program. That's what they have been asking for day after day. If I read the petitions right, the Liberals are saying: I would like to file a petition that nothing will happen to seniors until after the consultation process has taken place. Well, that consultation process now is taking place, and we will find out from seniors what is right for them. We won't find out from these guys; that's for sure.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the chair of the Seniors Advisory Council: what else will seniors have to give up in order to have these very low threshold levels raised?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the question. However, as chairman of the Seniors Advisory Council my purview at the moment is to take the consultation and bring it forward to the minister. The guidelines are clearly established. There is an approximately one billion dollar budget for benefits for seniors. The Alberta seniors' benefit program encompasses about \$111 million at the current

threshold levels. It's my expectation, following the number of discussions and meetings we've had, that a serious need to revisit those thresholds has been expressed by seniors. The envelope is quite clear: \$111 million in the Alberta seniors' benefit, somewhere within the framework of approximately one billion dollars in overall benefits to seniors.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplemental.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the chair of the Seniors Advisory Council: will you now agree to our request for an extension of the consultation deadline past April 9?

2:10

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, the issue raised about the extension of consultation is a very serious one that seniors have expressed. We have doubled up efforts in the department to be at as many meetings as we possibly can. Quite clearly the need to have a closure to the consultation is in order to have a chance to respond to the issues that are raised, do the math that's required, and bring back a report that we can give serious deliberation to. May I say at this time, though, in talking to seniors, that anyone who has a concern and has not had an opportunity to express it – we will continue to receive those concerns as long as is necessary.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier wishes to augment.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I really want to make this point. The Liberal opposition has been saying time and time again that there is no meaningful consultation. As a matter of fact, they have said that there is no consultation. Now they are admitting that indeed there is consultation, and in fact they want the process prolonged. I think that we can probably take as long as we need to take to make sure that what is right for seniors is right for all Albertans.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

Food Processing Development Centre

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has spent millions of taxpayers' dollars on equipment for the Leduc Food Processing Development Plant. Most of this equipment has never been used or is yet to be uncrated. I would direct my question to the hon. minister of agriculture this afternoon. Would the minister explain why millions of dollars of equipment have sat idle in this \$12 million facility?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the process of the development of our three-year plan – and it's unfortunate that evidently the hon. Member for Leduc hasn't read our three-year plan – we're going to be focusing on the development of value added. We've made that commitment to the agricultural community. The facility at Leduc is a very strong component of our value-added process. Indeed, the process being used in Leduc is being used at a growing rate. This is not a plant that you build and it is suddenly utilized to its maximum, and I hope there is an understanding of that. The utilization of the facility at Leduc has been increasing at an ongoing rate. Our whole focus in the agricultural community is to increase the value-

added component. It fits very well into the three-year plan that we have developed.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the minister intend to let two of the present three clients utilizing that facility, Gainers and Van's Sausage, continue the present practice of utilizing this facility at less than full cost recovery?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Again it's unfortunate that the hon. member hasn't read the three-year plan, or he would have known the answer. Indeed, we are working towards . . . [interjections] If you'd listen to the answer, you'd know the answer and you wouldn't have to ask the question again. Our whole focus is on cost recovery, and the plant at Leduc is on the cost-recovery pattern, just as every other component of agriculture is.

MR. KIRKLAND: Mr. Speaker, since the minister has reduced the budget for technology in the agriculture department, how does the minister actually intend to hire more scientists for that facility so it can operate as it was intended to operate? It clearly isn't today.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that overall we are increasing our funding for research and development to the tune of 12 percent for this coming year. That's a substantive increase. We have to recognize that R and D doesn't just take place in one particular building. We will be hiring a barley cereal specialist who will be developing a process in starch development, because barley is an important component of our agriculture plan. Indeed we are looking at reinforcing the value-added component to agriculture. We are working on the premise that agriculture is our future. If the projections for the net realized income for agriculture come true this year, they'll be at a record all-time high of \$1,100,000,000, which will make Alberta the number one agricultural producing province in all of Canada for the first time ever.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Access to Adoption Information

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want improved access to adoption records. Over 11,000 Albertans have signed a supporting petition. Unanimous agreement was reached in this Assembly for the related Bill. There was overwhelming support from 21 public meetings across Alberta supplemented by 500 written submissions. Yet this government refuses to listen. To the Minister of Family and Social Services: why does this minister refuse to listen to Albertans when he himself set up the process specifically asking for their input?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, this particular issue is a very complicated issue. It's been around a very long time. It's an issue that requires very careful consideration before we move forward with legislation. We did the first phase of the review, and I took that forward to the standing policy committee for review. We are now going back to look at what we presented and adding more information to it and new options for the committee. Like I said before – I believe it was earlier this week – I will be taking this forward in legislation early next fall.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MR. SEKULIC: Thank you. Mr. Minister, if you are looking at other options, why are you not including members of your original steering committee? Why are they resigning?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, there is no reason why anyone should resign from the committee, but maybe those particular members felt their job was completed. I thoroughly went through the report that was filed, and the recommendations are good. No doubt they will be included as part of the overall plan of new legislation next fall.

MR. SEKULIC: So will the minister, then, assure Albertans that he will not scrap the report of the steering committee like he scrapped the Bernd Walter report?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, there is no report that is being scrapped. The Bernd Walter report is not scrapped. We have the report. We are going under an 18-month review of the child welfare issue. This adoptions report will also be utilized during the process of the development of new legislation for next fall.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Alternatives to Dairy Products

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many people across Alberta cannot eat or drink dairy products. Problems such as lactose intolerance, milk allergies, or religious beliefs eliminate these products from their personal choices. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Why are people denied access to imitation dairy products, products which help fill this void in their diet?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed the constituents of Alberta are not denied products that are dairy products. The situation that I assume the member is referring to is Tofurella. Tofurella of course is an imitation dairy product that uses casein, which is a component of a dairy product, to manufacture an imitation cheese. However, it still has a component of a dairy product in it. For those people that want to use imitation dairy products such as tofu, tofu is sold in Alberta anywhere any merchant wants to sell it.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Minister, does this government condone restricted access to alternative dairy products?

2:20

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Not at all. As a matter of fact, this is a national policy, and the national policy basically states that imitation dairy products are not to be sold. Any other product that's not an imitation product can be sold quite freely across the counters.

MS CARLSON: Why has the minister not introduced changes to the Dairy Industry Act to make it easier to sell these alternative products in Alberta? We're the only province that doesn't do this.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: That's not quite true. We are not the only province that doesn't do this, to start with. However, we do have a thriving dairy industry. The dairy products are available, and the case has yet to be made on why we should be allowing imitation dairy products that only use in part a dairy product to compete with our dairy industry in Alberta. Why should we be

bringing product that's produced in other countries into Alberta to compete with our own industry? When that case can be made and there is no health issue involved, then of course we will support it.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mayfield.

Privatization of Public Works Services

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About a year ago this government announced that it was to privatize the helicopter service, and indeed this party agreed with that stance if and only if the government could prove that it was going to save the taxpayers money. However, a recent review that's been brought to light by a group of some contract employees of the government shows that it is in fact more expensive. My question is to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. Does the minister have any evidence that he's able to table that will prove without a doubt that this privatization is in fact going to save his department some money?

MR. THURBER: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member read the three-year business plan from the department of public works, he would see that this was an ongoing part of the plan to downsize government and to get out of the business of being in business in direct competition with the private sector.

MR. WHITE: Perhaps the minister missed the point of the question, and he said, yes, he would something. Now, I have to phrase this quite specifically. Does the minister have a report in his possession or in the department's possession that he can table with this House and prove once and for all that there are money savings in this particular privatization?

MR. THURBER: Mr. Speaker, there are some 25 to 30 different private companies in Alberta.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Good-bye, Ralph. Good-bye, Ralph.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. The hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services is entitled to be heard.

MR. THURBER: Mr. Speaker, as I started to say before I was rudely interrupted, there are many, many private companies in Alberta that provide helicopter service to both environment and public works and other government departments as well as to the private sector. We made a determination some time ago as a government that we would look at all the businesses we were in and try and get out of the business of being in business, and that's exactly what we're doing.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, final supplementary. To the same minister: is it the government's intention, then, to privatize many services regardless of any information they have simply for the sake of some ideology?

MR. THURBER: Mr. Speaker, in line with our government's mandate, we do a careful assessment of any privatization we do to make sure it's to the benefit of the taxpayers of this province.

Mental Health Services

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, it is a known fact in the province of Alberta that mental health services have never had equity within health care funding. I'm deeply concerned at the message that is being given by this government regarding mental

health services. I would refer you to the motion that was not supported by the government urging "the government to immediately address the shortage of mental health services for Alberta children," plus a 10 percent reduction in this year's budget to Alberta Hospital Edmonton, with further reductions. To the Minister of Health: are you suggesting that mental health services in the province of Alberta are adequately funded?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I leave it to your ruling on the appropriateness of the question in view of the fact that there will be four hours spent on the Minister of Health's budget tonight, but I am quite . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Tonight?

MRS. McCLELLAN: It's Thursday.

MR. DINNING: Designated subcommittee of supply.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Designated I believe by the opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that there was a mental health strategic planning process that occurred in this province, a very extensive process. I have also acknowledged in the House that that mental health strategic plan has been shared with the steering committee to ensure that it fits in the regional plan.

I would also remind the hon. member that there are four departments of this government that have come together to look at high-needs areas for children and that we are looking at a very comprehensive mental health plan in this province. If the hon. member would care to join us tonight, I would be pleased to elaborate.

MR. SPEAKER: Supplemental question.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. minister. My supplementary question is: in light of the premature downsizing and implementation of the strategic plan, will you stop that process by allowing adequate funding to take timely steps to ensure that the mentally ill are protected and given adequate services?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to comment further tonight on the whole mental health strategic plan. I am not sure whether the hon. member was referring to the strategic plan of Alberta Hospital Edmonton. I believe she was partly an author of that plan now being implemented. I think it was considered a very good plan.

Our concern is that mental health services are offered in a continuum, that it is not considered that everyone who has mental health concerns must be in an institution. Today that is not appropriate. What we want to ensure, Mr. Speaker, is that the appropriate care is available in the acute setting but, more importantly, in the community setting, where I believe most people desire to be.

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will the mental health envelope be protected?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Again, Mr. Speaker, I do believe the hon. member should attend our subcommittee tonight so that she has an opportunity to understand what the regionalization of health will mean for the people of this province. Throughout this province in however many regions are identified there will be a complete

and comprehensive range of health services that are appropriate to that community. Those decisions will be made by community priorities, and the services will be delivered by the communities addressing the best way to deliver those services. That is why it is so important that the mental health strategic plan was shared with the steering committee.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

Access Network

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Six weeks ago the Access board reported that they had now calculated the value of the network's assets and liabilities that are being contemplated for giveaway to CLT of Toronto. Five weeks ago in this House I asked the minister responsible for Access to tell us what that value was, but he has refused. My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer tell us why this financial information is being kept hidden from Albertans?

MR. DINNING: It is not, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Can the Treasurer tell us what the estimated value of that Access giveaway is?

MR. DINNING: When the hon. minister returns to the Assembly, I'm sure he'd want to answer that question.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Perhaps the Treasurer can answer this question. How can he stand idly by and allow a cash gift of about \$8 million to \$10 million to be given away to a company and this other giveaway of equipment and facilities and library materials at Access?

MR. DINNING: We are not doing that, Mr. Speaker.

Advanced Education Funding

MR. ZARIWNY: Mr. Speaker, in connection with my question I have four sets of reports to table. One set deals with the economic impact of the University of Lethbridge on the city of Lethbridge.

2:30

MR. DINNING: Is this tabling?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: This isn't tabling.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, it's the groundwork for a question, I guess.

The hon. member should do his tablings at the time of tablings in the future.

MR. ZARIWNY: Do I have permission to do it now?

MR. SPEAKER: Go ahead. Go ahead.

MR. ZARIWNY: The other one is by the academic staff from the Grande Prairie College dealing with the same subject; a press release from the president of the University of Lethbridge dealing with the same subject; a report from the city of Lethbridge dealing with the same subject; and a report from the students of Fairview dealing with the impact on Fairview.

Now I have my question, Mr. Speaker. The University of Lethbridge contributes \$170,000 a day – that's \$62 million a year – to the economy of the city of Lethbridge. Fairview College students contribute per student \$6,282 to the economy of Fairview.

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MR. ZARIWNY: I have one more preamble. An 11 percent cut in funding to the Grande Prairie College will result in a first-year loss to the Grande Prairie city economy of \$2.4 million. My first question is to the minister of advanced education. Can he tell us whether his department has prepared a study dealing with the impact that his devastating cuts will have on the small businesses in these communities?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear on the mandate of postsecondary education in this department. It has to do with educating students and providing a program there for them to access to further their studies. Certainly they'll make their contribution when they are finished those studies and enter into the economic circumstance of this province.

MR. ZARIWNY: Can the minister tell this House how his cuts will encourage communities to meet the Premier's objective of creating 110,000 jobs when most of these cuts will cost jobs?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way is back on that old Liberal adage that if the government hired everybody in the world, we would then have prosperity. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order.

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, I can only assume that his degree must be in economics to have a conclusion like that. There is a law of diminishing returns within that philosophy, and it just won't work. Let me reiterate: the responsibility of the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development is to provide and put in place a publicly funded system that will provide a postsecondary education system for the adult people of this province. That's what we're about. That's our mandate. Any questions regarding economic development in this province should be directed to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

MR. ZARIWNY: I can assure the minister I have three degrees. Can the minister right now assure this House that these three institutions will survive his New Zealand cuts?

MR. ADY: Mr. Speaker, again, "The sky is falling; the sky is falling," from over there. There has been no indication from those institutions to the minister of postsecondary education in this province that they're about to fail, that they will not be there. Certainly those institutions are going to be there. They're busy working within the context of the budget that they've received to put programs in place that will carry quality through and offer students in this province an excellent postsecondary education and skills.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Gainers Inc
(continued)

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Provincial Treasurer has already acknowledged that Ernst & Young was receiving \$435,000 a year to manage Gainers. We know that Gainers had their own set of lawyers to manage the sale. We know that in fact Richardson Greenshields was hired at \$330,000 a year. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. What did Richardson

Greenshields do to earn their money since everybody else was doing exactly the same thing, trying to sell Gainers?

MR. DINNING: Well, Mr. Speaker, the services of Richardson Greenshields were hired to assist the government in casting the broadest possible net to find a buyer for Gainers. As the member across the way knows, when you go into this business of trying to sell a business, you're serious when you've got an agent out there working on your behalf. We believe that. The market believes it. The proof is in the pudding, because today Gainers is no longer owned by the taxpayers.

DR. PERCY: Mr. Speaker, since the Provincial Treasurer has told us time and time again that in fact Ernst & Young was trying to sell Gainers . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling
Preambles

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order please. The hon. member has offended against the rule on supplemental questions.

The time for question period has expired. Therefore, the Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod.

head: Members' Statements
World Tuberculosis Day

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to bring attention of the members of this House to a health issue that is being given worldwide recognition today. March 24 has been recognized as World TB Day for many years by the International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease. It was on this day in 1882 that Dr. Robert Koch announced his discovery of the bacteria that causes TB. On this occasion I ask my colleagues to join with me in commending organizations worldwide who are fighting the spread of this debilitating disease. Estimates are that worldwide there are 12 million cases and 3 million deaths annually as a result of tuberculosis, yet this disease is 99 percent curable and 90 percent preventable.

Earlier today, on behalf of the government of Alberta, Alberta Health participated in a news conference in Edmonton to highlight the many difficulties communities face in battling the spread of tuberculosis. The health partners who participated stressed that we must continue to focus our efforts on helping those most at risk, that being the elderly, Canadians born in countries where rates of TB are very high, aboriginal communities, and those who have suppressed immune systems, such as people with HIV infections.

In this province the Alberta Lung Association is to be applauded for its continued leadership in raising awareness of TB. The government, through Alberta Health's tuberculosis services, has worked closely with the association to plan activities that will take place today across Alberta. Posters announcing World TB Day will be prominently displayed at hospitals in Edmonton and Calgary and at health units and federal health centres throughout the province.

On this day, Mr. Speaker, I take the opportunity to remind all Albertans that TB has not been eradicated. I urge Albertans to learn how they can actively take part in the elimination of tuberculosis.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Labour Market Restructuring

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although we have our eyes firmly fixed on the deficit today and dealing with debt, we

cannot ignore a long-term problem that now looms. If we look at our labour markets, what do we see? We see that unemployment rates have risen significantly, but what is more important, there's been a fundamental change in the structure of our labour markets. If we look at unemployment, we see that although the probability of being unemployed has risen somewhat slightly, the odds that you might lose your job, there has been a change: if you do lose your job, you're unemployed for a much longer period of time. In fact, if you look at the statistics for those that are 45 and older, if you become unemployed, the duration of unemployment is rising astronomically. If we look as well at the 15- to 24-year-old group, the odds that they're going to be unemployed have risen, and also the duration over which they are unemployed has risen as well.

2:40

So we face the problem that structural unemployment is here, and it appears here to stay. At the very time that we have this massive long-term unemployment problem facing us, we are cutting back in a wide range of our job retraining programs and active policies to get people back into the labour force. This is the very time, Mr. Speaker, that we should be looking, then, at active labour market policies: vocational training, retraining; we should be looking at programs that focus on individual initiatives; we should be looking at things like educational RRSPs; we should see governments then making sure that the unemployment insurance program is actuarially sound and taking those funds and putting them into the retraining. We should look at policies, then, that focus on acquiring skills and provide a vehicle and a mechanism for lifetime learning, because long-term unemployment is here to stay; increasing frequency of unemployment is here to stay.

As we look at the deficit, as we deal with the deficit, we have to realize that there are two sides to the ledger. People have to work to generate revenue to provide taxes to get the deficit down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Teachers' Salary Rollback

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share some good news from my constituency. The county of Lacombe board of education and the local ATA have signed a forward-looking agreement that means budget restraints while preserving the quality of education in our area. I am proud of their achievement, and I think it is a fine example for other jurisdictions who are working through this same problem.

On March 15 the teachers within the county agreed by a 93 percent majority to a 5 percent rollback in salaries. In exchange they are guaranteed job security until the end of the '94-95 school year. As well, the agreement will give ECS teachers and teachers with probationary contracts the first opportunity for positions which become vacant. There will be no layoffs within the county of Lacombe. This agreement demonstrates clear and competent leadership in my community. A negotiating committee from both sides met to work out the best possible solution for teachers, students, and the local board. Negotiations continue, as a joint committee of board and teacher representatives has been formed to look at further savings in the '94 budget year. This agreement will allow costs to be reduced while maintaining the quality of educational services within the school. Existing classroom programs will be preserved, and the students will be the ultimate benefactors.

The wisdom behind this agreement is especially obvious when compared to the situation that other boards are facing. In Calgary it's estimated that if a rollback is not achieved, 128 jobs in the Catholic system and 270 in the public system could be lost. I hope that the amicable and fair agreement reached in my area will be used by other locals as a benchmark in their negotiations. It is an excellent example of how classroom excellence, job concern, and cost-effective budgets can be satisfied.

head: Projected Government Business

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under *Beauchesne* 410 (7).

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. This is the projected government . . .

MR. MITCHELL: No, this is a point of order. Oh, I'm sorry.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognized the hon. Opposition House Leader in order to ask the projected government business question.

MR. MITCHELL: Then can I bring my point of order after?

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a full week since this government has last revealed what it's going to do in this Legislature, and it's about time we heard.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, again in the spirit of open accountability and good government we would like to let all colleagues know that on Monday in the afternoon our first order of business under government business will be Government Motion 16. Then we'll look at Government Bills and Orders in second reading, which will be Bill 1. Again if there's time, we will proceed to Committee of the Whole and third readings if possible, when time allows. That'll actually be followed in subsequent days and evenings, but we will look at those Bills which appear on the Order Paper in Committee of the Whole. In the evening we will be in Committee of Supply for the Department of Energy. On Tuesday evening will be Committee of Supply, Department of Environmental Protection. Wednesday evening will find us in Committee of Supply looking at the estimates of the Department of Community Development. Thursday we are happy to respond to the designation of the opposition for consideration of estimates in the Committee of Supply of the department of agriculture.

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. SPEAKER: Now the hon. Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under *Beauchesne* 410(7) in response to your ruling with respect to the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's supplemental question. It has implications for the question ruled out of order earlier, the question by the Member for Calgary-West.

I, as do my caucus colleagues, Mr. Speaker, greatly appreciate your efforts today, which have been consistent with previous efforts to clean up, if you will, to enhance the productivity of

question period. Just as at times you are concerned with the nature of our questions and the manner in which we present them, I want to assure you that we work very, very hard to streamline those questions as much as possible. Sometimes the answers are of course somewhat argumentative, and we are provoked to making statements that perhaps are not as consistent with the rules as you would like. We also acknowledge your efforts to streamline the answers of ministers, and there are days when those are particularly successful. Of course, there's still room for improvement.

Specifically I would like to ask the Speaker for some clarification on exactly what we will be able to do with respect to supplemental questions. The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud began his first supplemental question with a clause, not a statement but a clause. That clause was indicated by his use of the word "since." That word would designate not a declarative sentence but in fact a clause which would be punctuated with a comma and then followed by a question. The irony in a ruling that would not allow us to begin a question with a clause beginning with "since" or "given," for example, would be that we could actually start the question and end the question with the very same clause. So the length of the question, the nature of the question would not change at all. It would simply be an arbitrary decision, inconsistent with the variability of the English language, that we could use a clause at the end of a question but we couldn't use the clause at the beginning of the question. So I would simply ask that you reconsider that ruling.

I'll give you an example. We could say, "Since you have asked teachers, health care workers, and public-sector employees to take a minimum 5 percent rollback, will the minister now legislate rollbacks on those gross and excessive MLA pensions?" Now, you would have ruled that out of order today. On the other hand, had we said, "Will the minister now legislate rollbacks on those gross and excessive MLA pensions, since you have already asked teachers, health care workers, and public-sector employees to take a minimum 5 percent rollback?" Do you see my point, Mr. Speaker? You would have accepted the one but not the other, yet they are exactly the same question.

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly any of the elementary school students who are here today would be able to look at the Blues or indeed *Hansard* when it comes out and see that in many cases today the overuse, the misuse, and the abuse of the privilege of asking supplementaries, regardless of a "since" or a "wherefore," was grossly . . . [interjections] Hey, just have a seat; take a powder. [interjections] Hey, you're done. You're done, pal.

2:50

MR. SPEAKER: To the point of order, hon. Government House Leader.

MR. DAY: Thank you for sparing me from further abuse.

Mr. Speaker, it's obvious. We're talking here about the spirit of the Standing Orders and *Beauchesne* and the spirit of how you make deliberations. Anybody can come up with ways of interjecting adverbs, participle phrases, or dangling gerunds and have ways of having questions go longer than they should, but the ruling that you have consistently applied to both sides of this House is that there should be no preambles on supplementaries, period. So my example would be: since the House leader opposite is obviously suffering from indigestion from the leader's dinner last night, could he please not pursue such silly points of order. [interjections]

MR. SPEAKER: Order. [interjections] Order. Order.

The Chair has to say that part of the problem it had with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud's supplemental question was the atmosphere in the House. While the hon. Opposition House Leader may be able to hear how it commenced, that doesn't mean everybody in the House can hear how it commenced, including the Chair.

In passing, after yesterday's performance the Chair was approached by an hon. member to say that he just really couldn't stand having this type of thing continue because he had a splitting headache as a result of the noise. A lot depends on where hon. members are seated in relation to certain other hon. members, because certain other hon. members have very more penetrating voices than others.

Nevertheless, the Chair would urge hon. members to read *Beauchesne* 409 and 410 in their entirety and not selectively to get at the proper way of asking questions. It's quite clear that they should be able to craft their questions without having any type of preamble for the supplementals.

The Chair does disagree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung about starting questions with "since" or "given." Everybody has their little habits, but in the last Legislature there were a number of New Democratic Party members who liked to use this "given" formula. That formula certainly did not lead to brevity in the asking of questions, and then the resulting answers were also longer than need be in those circumstances. So the Chair has heard the concern of the hon. Opposition House Leader but would ask all members to . . .

We did by one means or another reach all hon. members who had given an indication of being interested in the question period today.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40 NHL Goal Scoring Record

MR. SPEAKER: The next item is an application under Standing Order 40 by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 40 to seek consent from this House to deal with the motion that I circulated a little bit earlier, and I would like to just briefly comment on why I believe it's important that we deal with this now. Mr. Gretzky, known better to us as the Great One, has again accomplished an outstanding achievement, a true milestone that bears some recognition. Even though he lives elsewhere, I know that he still reflects on Alberta so fondly because this is where many, in fact virtually all of his previous achievements have occurred. It is therefore important that we not forget his contributions to hockey and to our community and that we respond by allowing this motion to go forward to properly thank him. I would therefore ask that the House give us consent to proceed with this motion today.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, does the Assembly grant the required consent?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore.

Moved by Mr. Zwozdesky:

Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize the outstanding achievements of Wayne Gretzky becoming the NHL all-time leading goal scorer.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wayne Gretzky is of course a former Edmontonian and truly one of Alberta's proudest adopted sons. This gentleman resided in our province for over 10 years, during which time he gave us and the entire world some of the most memorable moments in hockey history.

He has surpassed and now holds nearly every hockey record there is. To begin naming them individually would require a full day in itself. However, in salute of those accomplishments which most directly touched the hearts of so many Albertans and Canadians, let me just mention that he captained the Edmonton Oilers to five Stanley Cup championships and Team Canada to its triumphant victory in the six-nation Canada Cup tournament in 1987. He also holds records such as the most points ever by a centre, the most overtime assists ever, the most consecutive 100 or more points seasons, the most goals in a single season, as well as the most assists in a single season, and the highest goals per game average. He also holds the most goals ever scored in an all-star game. In addition, Wayne Gretzky holds nine Hart memorial trophies for most valuable player, nine Art Ross trophies for scoring championships in a single season, two Conn Smythe trophies, five Lester B. Pearson awards, three Lady Byng awards, four Emery Edge awards for the best plus/minus rating, and three Chrysler Dodge NHL performer of the year awards. Outstanding accomplishments. He is also the youngest player in his sport to reach these and so many other career milestones, and he has handled each of them with easy aplomb as befits a national treasure and provincial hero.

His off-ice activities are equally deserving of our thanks and our praise. While he lived here, Mr. Speaker, he personally organized an annual celebrity tennis or softball tournament for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. He was a public spokesman for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation International and for the international council on drug abuse. The charitable endeavour closest to his heart, however, was his work with the mentally handicapped, for whom he served as the Edmonton area chairman. He gave freely of his time to so many worthwhile activities and organizations and during his stay with us was a frequent visitor to the Winnifred Stewart school, to local hospitals, and to several city schools. In 1983 when the Rainbow Society established its first Canadian-based chapter in Winnipeg, it was Wayne who granted their first ever wish to a terminally ill child. Since that time he has granted many more, and during road trips he often visited families which the Rainbow Society had requested.

His benevolence has been felt everywhere. Few people know that, for example, for every Oilers hockey game Wayne Gretzky personally paid for 55 tickets which were distributed freely to various clubs and charities throughout the Edmonton area. As a result of his donations every visually impaired child in Alberta who is registered with the CNIB library received a cassette machine on which to listen to recordings of books. As well, a special house for mentally handicapped adults bearing his name is soon to be constructed. This man has created a legacy of great achievements that are admired worldwide.

3:00

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Wayne Gretzky is truly a remarkable individual and has already been awarded the Great Canadian award for having brought international recognition and acclaim to Alberta and, more importantly, to all of Canada. He was a good friend to me when I sought his help on a project called

Universiade, which I'm sure Mr. Speaker and other members of this House will recall, another example that catapulted Edmonton, Alberta, and Canada onto the international scene. He has brought this city and this province many great honours. Today we have an opportunity in this House to return a small honour of our own. I would therefore seek unanimous consent for this motion when it comes up for a vote.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Avonmore, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried, let the record show unanimously.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Come to attention.

head: Main Estimates 1994-95

Transportation and Utilities

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Today for the second day we are going over the estimates of Transportation and Utilities. We look forward to a good debate and questions, and I would ask the minister to give some opening remarks, if he cares to do so.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, on Wednesday, March 9, in the evening sitting I had a number of questions put by the Assembly, and I'd like to respond to those. After that, hopefully, we'll have other questions.

I'll start with the Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod. A question was posed: could the Department of Transportation and Utilities consider extending the 110 kilometres per hour south of Claresholm to Fort Macleod? The response to that is that the speed limit on Highway 2 is currently 110 kilometres per hour to Granum, but from Granum to Fort Macleod the speed limit is in the process of being increased. As soon as the final paving is completed this summer, we'll have a new speed limit. New speed limit signs will be posted as soon as that construction is over.

The second question was: would the department consider installation of street lights at the intersection of Highway 3 and the Oldman River dam access road? We will be proposing a cost-sharing agreement with the municipality. We're prepared to install the lights at the intersection if the local municipalities are agreeable to pay the ongoing operating costs, and we'll be making a proposal to the municipal district shortly.

The third question by the hon. Member for Pincher Creek-Macleod was the naming of Highway 40 through Kananaskis Country as Bighorn Highway. The question refers to two different roads. While Highway 40 has been named Bighorn Highway, there is a section of the forestry trunk road north of the municipality of Crowsnest Pass, secondary highway 541, that is

currently designated as a local road. The local municipality has the authority to name this road Bighorn road.

The next question was posed by the Member for Calgary-Bow in regards to the estimates dollars for the primary highway connector in Calgary. The question was: what dollars are available? I'd like to respond that for the Stoney trail in Calgary there's \$5 million, and for the Yellowhead trail-Capilano drive interchange in Edmonton there's some \$2 million allocated for that project.

The next question was raised by Edmonton-Rutherford, and that was in regards to: how come the financial assistance for rural roads has increased while urban transportation has decreased? I'd like to just lay out the facts on this, Mr. Chairman. The urban programs have decreased some \$6.1 million, or 9.4 percent, while the rural programs for the '94-95 budget have decreased some \$6.3 million, or 8.2 percent – not, as suggested by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, a large difference of some 23 percent for urban and an increase in rural.

The next question was asked by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford: is the minister giving special preference to road projects in his constituency? Mr. Chairman, I've said this a number of times, and I guess it needs repeating. All highway projects are prioritized by department staff and are based on engineering needs and budget availability. There is no overlay program that's done without a thorough review by the transportation department.

I'd like to table for every member a copy of just the procedures that we go through in regards to overlay and rehab on all highways in the province of Alberta. Mr. Chairman, just to make sure that we're clear on this, there is no special treatment given to any highway in the province of Alberta unless it passes the test of that study that is being presented to the members now. It's called the pavement management system, and it has three or four categories to it. I won't go through it, because the members can read it, but it takes into consideration the riding comfort index, the visual condition index, the structural adequacy index, and the pavement quality index. It's quite a detailed program that takes place before any highway in the province of Alberta under the jurisdiction of the Department of Transportation and Utilities is considered for overlay or rehab.

The question was asked: are there any reductions in assistance for transit capital projects? I suppose this was being referred to for the city of Edmonton, and I'd like to just put on record that transportation grants have been reduced in '94. The public transit operating assistance grant, which was previously a component of our Alberta cities transportation partnership, has been transferred to Alberta Municipal Affairs, but the '94-95 basic capital grant has been maintained at the '93-94 level of \$25 per capita. For the city of Edmonton this translates into an increase from \$15,454,875 in '93-94 to some \$15,674,975 in '94-95. In addition, Mr. Chairman, the primary highway maintenance assistance grant has been retained at the '93-94 level of \$1,959 per lane-kilometre of highway.

The other question was: why has the transit operating grant for the city of Edmonton been reduced to zero while other cities continue to receive the grant? Mr. Chairman, the grants for the city of Edmonton consisted of some \$5.2 million, which is 5.7 percent of their \$91 million budget. In regards to the other cities, they've all had a reduction of 20 percent, with possible reductions in future years. So even though the city of Edmonton received a 5.7 percent reduction, all other cities received a 20 percent reduction for their public transit operating assistance grant.

The next question was raised by the Member for Lethbridge-East. He wanted to know what criteria were used to determine

the need of building a new highway or repairing an existing highway and the difference between hot pavement and cold pavement. Well, Mr. Chairman, many factors are considered. Examples include safety, maintaining the existing infrastructure, the amount and type of traffic, the ability to service existing and future developments. Indeed, to pave a highway is primarily determined by the amount of traffic that will be used on that road. Of course, to have overlay, again you'll have to go through the procedure that I just tabled.

To determine whether you have a cold pavement, that is mostly used for repairing an existing highway. Of course, a hot pavement is an overlay that is done once it passes the test of our engineering study.

3:10

Another question was raised: why are there two parallel highways, Highway 2 and secondary highway 811, running north of Fort Macleod? These paved highways are only four miles apart. Mr. Chairman, traffic volumes have a large bearing on whether you pave highways or base course highways. Of course, when you run into highways of a secondary system, they are only done with the co-operation of the local municipalities. Secondary highways are not being considered for base course until they exceed 200 vehicles per day. In the case of Highway 2, that highway carries 3,000 vehicles per day, and secondary highway 811 carries up to 700 vehicles per day. So it's quite clear that the reason for the paving is because of the traffic count. Furthermore, another factor that we used is that local traffic from north and east of Fort Macleod would be forced to travel approximately eight miles further south to reach Fort Macleod via Highway 2, and of course road user costs would increase significantly.

Another question was raised: could regional offices be totally eliminated? As I said in the House that night, yes, and we'll be looking at all those offices in the province of Alberta. We're moving, as our three-year business plan outlines, more towards the concept of business centres, and we'll be looking at a number of those offices to see if we can reduce them without affecting the traveling public.

Another question by the Member for Lethbridge-East was: why are we providing grants to REAs and rural gas co-ops? I just want to say that the main purpose of these grants for REAs and rural gas is to put farmers and other rural residents on a more equitable basis with their urban counterparts. When you look at the cost of providing power or natural gas to a resident in rural Alberta as compared to what you pay in the city of Lethbridge or any city, for that matter, it doesn't take much more than just some common sense, why we have those programs available to rural Alberta.

Another question was asked by the same member in regards to plans for north-south twinning after Highway 2 is completed south to Highway 3. Both of these highways relate to our long-term plan to upgrade an export highway to the United States. After completing the four lanes on Highway 2 south to Highway 3, plans are to continue twinning from Fort Macleod to Monarch on Highway 3. This will complete the twinning from Calgary to Lethbridge. Upgrading of the first 12 kilometres of Highway 4 south of Lethbridge will not be initiated until the four-laning on Highway 3 is completed. Of course, we hope that we can continue with this export funding in co-operation with the federal government so that we can see more road being twinned from Lethbridge to the American border.

Why are revenues from auto registrations and drivers' licences dedicated to Alberta Transportation and Utilities? Well, I'd just like to answer it this way. Fuel taxes, vehicle registrations, and drivers' licences are all important in regards to implementing user

pay. These all relate to highways and roads that these people with vehicles use. The cost of collecting these fees by Alberta registries and the cost of policing on the highways system in Alberta are taken into account before the revenues are dedicated to Transportation and Utilities. That means that the funds required to keep Alberta registries even with their collection fees are taken out before those funds are transferred to Alberta transportation.

The Member for Edmonton-Roper asked the question: why doesn't the department use sand instead of water to fill ruts on a winter road to Fort Chipewyan? Well, I don't think the member understands what a winter road is. Otherwise, he'd know that if you put in dry sand on a winter road, it would just bounce out and blow away. So they use water trucks to fill the holes and keep the road level in the wintertime and snowplow it that way. If it were left in a natural state, the road surface would quickly deteriorate to a rough condition. The total expenditures are between \$30,000 and \$50,000, not \$1.5 million as quoted by the Member for Edmonton-Roper.

Another question by the Member for Edmonton-Roper was: why is it that we're providing grants of \$250,000 for remote area heating? Well, remote heating grants are very, very important to the residents of the remote communities that cannot get gas service. They have some relief from the high cost to heat their homes. I want to just give you an example. A typical resident in Fort Chipewyan pays over \$1,400 each year to heat a small home. Even after the 25 percent grant, the cost of home heating to that resident is still around \$1,100, or twice the amount for a similar residence in the city of Edmonton. So that's a program that we'll continue to provide for those people that cannot have access to natural gas in that location.

The Member for Fort McMurray asked the question: why is the budget being cut in transportation, and revenue is going up, so that at the end of the budget time transportation will have moved from a service supplied to Albertans to a cash cow that is feeding general revenue for the government of Alberta? Well, if the hon. member had looked at our budget sheet, he would have noticed that when we fund Alberta public safety services, we are still going into general revenue for additional dollars. It's not a surplus. This has been planned to help eliminate the deficit. Hopefully, in the years ahead if we do have a surplus, this will be essential to provide for road construction, that the hon. member is asking for now to do Highway 63. I hope he realizes that you have to have dollars to construct new highways, and that is where it will come from. To say it's a cash cow, when it doesn't fund the total Department of Transportation and Utilities now, is not correct.

The next question was: when will we be doing the remaining 18 kilometres on Highway 63? I mentioned before and I want to do it again: once this budget is passed, if it ever is, with the co-operation of all members, this project will be reviewed with the MLA for Athabasca-Wabasca, whose constituency the road is in. Hopefully we'll be able to provide some news in this regard in the very near future.

I was asked a question by the Member for Leduc in regards to the \$765,000 expense in Alberta Resources railroad. The question relates to the estimate of \$765,000 under rail infrastructure development. Will it disappear with the sale of that railroad? Mr. Chairman, the \$765,000 estimate is to accommodate the repayment to the capital fund which funded Al-Pac and Daishowa rail infrastructure. These payments will continue until the loan from the capital fund has been fully repaid.

Another question from the Member for Leduc was: what reduction has the department made in the minister's office and the deputy minister's office? I want to respond, Mr. Chairman, that

both the minister's office and deputy minister's office staff has been reduced prior to '94-95 - we did it last year - and the balance of the people that he talks about that will decrease will come from the regional transportation division and administration offices and divisions throughout the province.

The next question was: does the department have any plans to charge municipalities user fees for such activities as advisory, administrative, and technical services? Mr. Chairman, from time to time we provide these types of services to our municipalities as partners. We do not charge them a user fee. We do not have a program to provide these types of services to municipalities, and we have no desire to compete with the private sector, where these services can be acquired by the municipalities. We will be looking forward to the municipalities getting all these services done by the private sector and not by the Department of Transportation and Utilities. Therefore we will not be charging them.

3:20

The question was raised again in regards to: why are urban grants reduced when rural road grants are increased? I don't know how the member could arrive at that. What has happened is that some IDs have moved into MD status, and we've moved the funding around, but the reduction to municipalities has been as high as 30 percent with MDs and counties and local governments, and they're also asked to cost share in the construction of secondary highways. I can advise again, Mr. Chairman, that the road grants to counties, municipal districts, and special areas are reduced by 17 percent from '93-94, and the grants to towns and villages are reduced some 22 percent from '93-94. As I've said, some grants will be reduced, the ongoing grants, as high as 30 percent, as we move through a three-year business plan.

Another question asked by the Member for Leduc was: is the internal audit a specific area of the department? The internal audit service is a unit of six employees reporting to the deputy minister. I might add that the creation of the internal audit unit in the department was recommended by the Auditor General, and it's my expectation that over the next three years our internal audit unit will be used extensively in ensuring that the department meets or exceeds the goals and objectives that we articulated in our three-year business plan.

The next question was: can the minister explain why a public communications budget item would show a \$25,000 reduction and not reflect a more realistic reduction? My answer to that, Mr. Chairman, is that that \$25,000 reduction to which the hon. member refers represents a 5 percent reduction in a small area of the department. If he'd go back just a year, the reduction becomes \$48,000, or over 9 percent. We are reducing our budget by changing our focus from construction to maintenance. Of course that's part of our commitment to Albertans.

Has the department undertaken a study to determine if tridem-axle trailers cause a serious rutting problem? That was another question from the Member for Leduc. I'd like to respond, just say that when the Transportation Association of Canada conducted their vehicle weight and dimensions research for 1987-88, the effects of various axles on pavement and bridges were studied in full detail. The allowable weights were then set such that any one axle type does not cause any more damage to the roadway than was caused by any other axle types. The weights allowed on tridem-axle trailers do not cause any more damage than any other type of truck or axle. [Mr. Trynchy's speaking time expired] If I could just have one - I've got one more question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we'll make sure - I'm sure you'll have some other questions, and you can answer those questions then.

MR. TRYNCHY: Sure. Very good.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I'd be willing to give him unanimous support. He's doing a good job.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, we can do it. Can we have unanimous consent of the House to let the minister finish his questions?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, if any? Okay.

MR. TRYNCHY: We have one more question from the Member for Leduc, and that was in regards to Alberta Public Safety Services. The question was: will the revenue increase result in charges to municipalities for service that we render to them? I'd like to answer it this way, Mr. Chairman. Alberta Public Safety Services revenue is projected to increase by some \$329,000 in '94-95, but most of this amount, precisely \$245,000, or 74 percent, relates to increased cost recoveries from the federal government. An additional \$41,000 will be generated from the sale of safety-related publications and videos and \$39,000 from the issuance of dangerous goods permits. The agency will generate a further \$43,000 through the introduction of new and modest tuition fees designed to partially offset the cost of training courses offered by the agency. Of course these training courses that we've been offering in the past have been cost shared with municipalities, and about 50 percent of the tuition fees will be absorbed by Alberta municipalities.

So, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for allowing me to finish the questions we had on Wednesday, March 9, and I'm prepared to take other questions.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you for the detailed answers, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. [some applause] Such exuberance startled me for a minute there. I remember an old politician once telling me 20 years ago that you never had to worry about the people across from you; it was the ones behind you. So when I heard that, I was wondering what was going on. I think that applies over there too.

First of all, I'd thank the minister for . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, we want to hear the hon. member. We had rules last night; they're in place today. If you want to talk, you sit down beside the members and talk.

MR. DAY: I'm just bringing them to order, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I mean, I would surely hope that the Government House Leader would know the rules by now.

Hon. member.

MR. N. TAYLOR: I wish you lots of success, because there's an involuntary reaction amongst most politicians as soon as they get on their feet: if you're a minister, you want to say grace, but if you're a politician, you start giving a speech. So by sitting them down, there's no question that you will bring a great deal of

silence to the Legislature, because they're used to eating when they sit down, not talking.

Debate Continued

MR. N. TAYLOR: Nevertheless, Mr. Chairman, to the minister. I have a few general ones, and I'll apologize if somehow or another he may have answered them. I wanted to compliment him, first of all, for the very detailed answers and for coming back so fast, because with some ministers you usually get the answers to the questions you asked just about a half a day before the next year's estimates. To come back this fast - there's a couple of them looking at me, so I hope they don't get alarmed. I hope that his example of answering very quickly, even before the second estimates, will rub off on a few of his neighbours. [interjection] Actually, I don't know about the Minister of Health; I guess I'll have to take that back. [interjection] I haven't asked you a question.

Mr. Chairman, subprogram 2.6 mentions transportation services, which I think covers rail as well as airports and so on and so forth. I had quite a few complaints through northern Alberta, Mr. Minister, that the railroads are not keeping up their fences along the rights-of-way, so if you're running any cattle or horses, it's a big fight to get the railroad to fix the fence. I'm just wondering, if the minister had time: is there any particular number they could call, or does he have a department that will call up the railroad and say: "Look, on the northeast of section 7, township such and such, range something, your fence is allowing cattle through. Why don't you get out there and fix it?" It seems hard for the farmers to find the button to press. I know they call their MLA, and occasionally I, too, have trouble finding the button to press. Maybe the minister knows a button that he can press or maybe transmit to us to somehow get the railroads to repair their fences.

There's another question with respect to railroads. My understanding - and the minister could correct me - is that the spur line that goes into Daishowa has a subcontract on it that the department of transport has to repair it anytime it slides out with water or rain, because it's built on bentonitic shales through that west bank of the Peace River. Both banks of the Peace River have a tendency every now and again after a wet season to pick up and move anywhere from 10 feet to 200 feet. When they first built the spur line to Daishowa, I believe that the Alberta government had to give a guarantee that they would repair any damage done by slides to the rail line. I just wanted to know if that's still in force. Maybe he could tell us a little bit more about it.

Then vote 4.3.1, municipal water and wastewater management. There are a couple of towns in my area between Redwater and Smoky Lake - Waskatenau, Radway, through there - maybe he would care to inform me ahead of time just where their applications are standing or just what he thinks about them.

The next question I want to ask is on 4.4.2. That's the remote area heating grant program. I know you touched on it a bit, I think when you were talking to the Member for Edmonton-Roper. Here's an area that I really kind of worry about, because I gather that not only is it cut back 29 percent this year, but it's going to be cut out altogether, eliminated. I think the heating grant for our remote areas should be retained; in other words, spend, spend, spend. But we're only talking about \$300,000 or \$400,000. If we're going to develop some of our remote areas of the province, encourage people to live in them, I think it's money well spent. Particularly as gas prices are accelerating now, moving up, I think it would be a good idea to retain this. So he would not get any arguments from me if they changed the policy and retained it. I don't like to see it phased out, because whether you live in Fort Chip or Fort Vermilion or Carcajou or anywhere up there, it is a

fairly high item. Heating is a fairly high item, and I think we want to have these people settling out there. I think it's too early to cut back.

One of the things I wanted to ask about highways, I think 794, but the minister's got a better memory than I have. Highway 794 is the one that connects Westlock to Highway 2; isn't it?

3:30

MR. TRYNCHY: Yup.

MR. N. TAYLOR: You mentioned volume as a method of determining whether a highway gets more work done on it. Well, the volume on this particular highway is fairly high. It's not the highest in the province, but there's another measurement that I think the minister should consider, and that is the number of accidents and in particular the number of fatal accidents. It's almost axiomatic that you can pick up the newspaper and find that there's been two to four deaths every six months on highway 794. So I think that when they come back and say that it shouldn't be paved because it doesn't handle the volume is overlooking the fact that it is an extraordinarily dangerous highway with a great deal of traffic, particularly the type that causes death-dealing accidents, which are big trucks cutting through to the Peace River country. Rather than going around on Highway 2, they decide to come through that so-called shortcut. After circumventing Edmonton to the south and coming out on the west side, it's only natural to go up 794 to Westlock to connect up with roads that are either going northwest to Grande Prairie through Barrhead or go straight north into the Slave Lake country. The combination of big trucks, a road with no shoulders, and some sharp curves I think should move it very high on the list.

The other thing that's a problem with 794 is that it's on the borderline between the MDs of Sturgeon, Westlock, and the county of Barrhead. It means that the normal pressure that the minister gets put on him by MDs to get something done doesn't occur because it's on the fringe of everybody's area. So it doesn't get the political pressure that it should. I'd like to see the minister take that in hand and upgrade that into a highway and be an extension of a main provincial highway that now runs from Slave Lake to Westlock and let it continue down. I think that's 40 or 41. I'm having trouble with the number.

MR. TRYNCHY: It's 44.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Pardon? Slave Lake to Westlock. Forty?

MR. TRYNCHY: Forty-four.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Forty-four. Thank you very much. It would be nice to see it extended down and 794 become 44. Take it off the rural MDs' backs and use it as another major thoroughfare.

There's another in my constituency, as the minister's probably well aware of, 652 that goes from Legal to Redwater. They've been fighting for years. Half want to go through the lake; half want

to go around. I'd like to suggest to the minister that the people of Legal and Redwater have been fighting for so long for that to go through that they shouldn't be deprived of a paved contact. All we would have to do is move south . . .

MR. TRYNCHY: Highway 651?

AN HON. MEMBER: You said 652.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Isn't it 652? It's east-west between . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: It's 651.

MR. N. TAYLOR: Yeah, I'm sorry. I stand corrected. Highway 651. It's the east-west one that now comes up to Lily Lake and then goes around to the north on a gravel road. If they come south, Mr. Minister, after they hit Lily Lake, two miles to township line 542, it's only three miles, three miles of paving, because Highway 28 is so close to Lily Lake there. Whereas if you try to go through Lily Lake up to the north, Highway 28 curves away. So you've got five, six, seven miles, whatever it is. It depends where you're going to come across to do it. I'd submit that I think the minister should think very closely about paving township road 542 for just those three miles. That would give Redwater and Legal a paved connection, would finish highway 651 through to a paved connection, across there all the way from west of Barrhead to Redwater.

Let the people continue the fight for the next 20 years, if they want to, bat their heads against the environmental wall, going through the lake. If they ever get it solved, okay. But right now the MD is spending hundreds of thousands of the taxpayers' dollars fighting the environmentalists. As you know, in this day and age, particularly if you try to go through a swamp or a lake, you have awful trouble. The MD seems to think that environmental problems shouldn't matter to anybody that's more than five miles away. Well, that's the whole concept of an environment: environmental problems do matter to everybody whether it's a swamp way down in southern Alberta or H₂S stacks over on the west side of the province. You can't just put environment in a little package and say that we'll do away with the environment in this particular area because it's more convenient to do so. I'd like to see the minister look at paving township road 542 from the Lily Lake road to Highway 28 – there are only three miles – and let the battle for 651 go on and on and on and on, as it is likely to do; going through the lake, that is.

Another question, 5.4, disaster assistance. Since Penhold is closing down, maybe the minister – he's nearly as old as I am, maybe even as wise as I am – will remember the former Premier called Lougheed building a bunker down there. I think the deputy at that time was in and digging the holes. We've got a huge badger hole down there, Mr. Chairman, that was fairly well equipped to become a command centre in case Alberta ever came under attack. I just wonder what you're going to do with that bunker. Are we going to store wheat in it, or is it going to become a tourist attraction? On the other hand, could you and I open up a motel there or something? It would be the only underground motel in Alberta.

MR. TRYNCHY: It belongs to Ottawa, not us.

MR. N. TAYLOR: He says it belongs to Ottawa, yet it was built for the Premier. Well, you can answer whatever it is, rather than carry on the debate. I understand that the bunker was built for the Premier and the cabinet to be able to run Alberta if things are all gone. Now, of course the communist threat has disappeared, they're closing Penhold, and I'm just wondering what they're doing now. Somebody shouted that it belongs to the federal government, but I'd rather see that in writing. Even if it belongs to the federal government, maybe they'll turn it over to us for a small stipend and we can do something with it. It'd be a great poker den too; wouldn't it, Mr. Chairman?

Anyhow, through the Chair to the minister. I'd like to ask if telecommunications, telephone lines and that, are under the

minister's – that's not in the minister's purview? That's in the municipal. I see. I had something to bring up on that.

Alberta Resources Railway, that sale: does that come under the minister or is that moved over to municipal? The minister nods. Okay. The Alberta Resources Railway sale: will the money that comes in from that go to debt reduction, or will it go into this year's income to help reduce the deficit? In other words, is the money going to be used to reduce the yearly deficit, or is it going to be used to reduce our total debt? I'd be interested in knowing if the minister knows what's going to happen to the money.

A couple more small points. I'd like to see the minister seriously consider putting back licence plates on the fronts of vehicles. [interjection] I don't always have that much support in my caucus. I like it on the front of the vehicles because it helps pick up the licence number. [interjections] I'm getting all sorts here, but nevertheless I like it. I will still fight for it, Mr. Minister, but you obviously have a lot of supporters over here that don't want a front licence. I'd much rather read what the car's licence number is than a really big sign saying: "Visit beautiful downtown Athabasca" or on the other hand "Eat lamb; 10,000 coyotes can't be wrong," all that type of stuff that you usually see on the front licence plate. So why not put a front licence plate on there? The police tell me that often they have been denied and people have been denied a chance to report a maleficence or a breaking of the law by somebody in a vehicle because their licence plate wasn't in the front. I'd like to see that brought back. Also while we're at it, why not adopt an old British, a west European custom of permanent licence plates? That way, then, the cost of the extra wouldn't matter. If you had permanent licence plates and just transferred the title of the vehicle like we would in land or something like that, I think it might be a good idea.

That, Mr. Chairman, is all I have to say at this time. Thank you.

3:40

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. Member for Redwater.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just had three brief notes that I wanted to make, but first I'd like to congratulate the minister on the job he is doing and also pass that congratulation on to the staff. The reason I try to be so nice to the hon. minister is twofold. One is that he has taken many of us rookies under his wing and has taught us how to try and operate.

MR. TRYNCHY: And fed you.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Chairman, the hon. minister is correcting me. He has not only taken us under his wing, but he has also fed and nurtured us. I want him to know that I appreciate that. The other reason of course is the export highway.

I would like to raise three points with the minister by way of questioning. Since being elected on June 15, I have traveled back and forth to Lethbridge and Edmonton every week and mostly by vehicle. At the weigh station at Leduc and at the weigh station at Balzac, just north of Calgary, there are a couple of large facilities that have a big sign on the side of them that says Safety in Motion, and I just want to ask the minister about the use of those facilities because I have yet to see anything happen in either of those structures. Now, I recognize that most times that I'm traveling on the road it's either late at night or very late at night, but I have had the opportunity out of session to travel during the

day, and I've yet to see them used. So I'm curious as to what might be happening there.

The second area again is dealing with Highway 2. I don't understand the job that highway crews have to do, but again in many instances I've observed what seems to be relatively simple tasks being done. There's a tremendous amount of equipment that is there. In one case recently, it appeared changing a pole, I think there were three vehicles and something like seven people. I would just ask if that sort of thing was normal.

The third thing is by way of I think wanting to indicate my agreement but wondering how far along we are. I was very, very impressed in the fall session when we talked about a new highway signage situation where rural community businesses would be able to advertise their business on the side of the road and a chamber of commerce or some such organization would have the ability to perhaps raise some funds for themselves by these businesses taking out – I don't recall whether it was meter-by-meter size spaces on these signs. I've yet to see them, and I'm just curious as to when that will be coming, because I'm very supportive of it.

Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. GERMAIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. During the interesting debate we had here a couple of weeks ago I raised some issues about the net budgeting concept, and the minister of transportation felt that in some fashion I didn't understand the concept. The issue that presents itself in the budget is the level to which the net budgeting approach masks the ability of this Assembly to vote on cost issues. When we discuss the estimates and the budgets, we're discussing the cost issues and we're voting on cost issues. I could see a situation where we're voting, for example, as we are in this particular program, for one item that is a \$20 million expenditure but really is a much larger expenditure, the expenditure having been masked by the fact that there is some revenue attributed to it. That was a concern to me, and it may be a concern to other members of the Assembly, to other members of the House.

I take no exception to the presentment of the budget in the fashion that the minister seeks to do it and to the extent that he is on the cutting and leading edge of net budgeting. He will expect, I'm sure, the commentaries entrained into his budget debates about the general process. It is nice for the minister to be able to stand up and say: lookit, roads in this province cost us X, but we do collect fuel taxes that equal that and we're close.

Now, as the three-year business plan unfolds, we see that the minister will be generating a surplus and the issue became where will that surplus go, because the people that pay the fuel taxes may well say that that surplus should go back into the road network. In fact, the minister I think two weeks ago did suggest that that might well be where the surplus goes. However, in the presentment of the budget information the surplus and the profits are indicated as being a return to government. They're not indicated as being a dedicated to transportation approach, and the minister might want to look at that issue.

I want to pick up where I left off last week now, Mr. Chairman, by directing some inquiry and comment to the minister concerning the issue of snowmobiles and the licensing of snowmobiles in the province of Alberta. Other members in this Assembly asked the minister about this, and the minister is very aware of the issue of snowmobiles and the impact that snowmobiles have in the province, because his area of residence is an area where they

get reasonable snow. There has been a lot of clearing, logging roads and the like, and there is an active tourist industry that relates to snowmobilers. I have had representations from different snowmobile organizations that have pointed out that some individuals license their snowmobiles and others do not. It would be instructional for this Assembly if the minister could tell us whether there are any long-range plans in effect to oblige all snowmobilers to be licensed. Secondly, if so, will that revenue in some fashion be dedicated to the creation of snowmobile trails and other value-added tourist attractions for snowmobile users?

I now want to pick up on the northern resources railroad and the Daishowa spur line as well as the main trunk that has been sold in the last option to Canadian National. Now, the Premier was obliged some days ago to comment in the House that interest would be paid on the carried portion of the northern resources railway sale to CN, the \$33 million sale spread over time. The Premier said that interest would be paid. The minister very fairly entered the House two days later and filed the document. Now, I've reviewed the document and I don't see a provision in the document for the payment of interest, and I wonder if the minister could indicate whether or not interest is to be collected or whether the \$33 million is an all-inclusive blended payment which includes interest. If the answer is in fact that it is an all-included blended payment, then the minister who has indicated in the House on several occasions his interest in budgetary and finance matters must have what he feels is the net figure without the blending of interest, and I would ask him to advise us and instruct us in the House as to what the adjusted purchase price is and what notional interest rate he used for the purpose of calculating the net interest rate. The minister might also ask the Premier as well to indicate whether or not some correction of that information given in the House will be necessary.

3:50

I want to also ask about other issues of this particular sale. It was indicated in the press release issued by the minister's department that the entire asset base of the corporation was being sold, yet there was no mention of the Daishowa spur line, and in fact the minister of economic development indicated that if this particular member now speaking had read the press release, he would have seen that the Daishowa spur line was not included. That then begs the question: what has happened to the Daishowa spur line? If in fact CN already has effectively an asset interest in the Daishowa spur line that is awaiting only the completion of land titles transfers for the purpose of registering that particular sale, then I would ask the minister of transportation to advise us as to whether any additional funds are going to be coming into the budget from the final disposition of the Daishowa spur line and where in the budget documents it reveals how much the government did receive for developing this particular spur line. Then once we have those first principles out of the way, the minister might perhaps tell us whether we have now reached the end of the line on the northern resources railroad or whether it will be necessary for the minister in his budget to provide any additional funding for other contingent liabilities that may come up from time to time.

I have been asked by one of the members to ask the minister for further clarification on Highway 40 north from Grande Cache to Grande Prairie and south from Hinton. I noticed last week the minister indicated that he was looking at applying a cold base to that particular highway, and I just wonder if with the passage of time the minister now has the information available where he can expand on exactly what segments of those roads will be completed this particular year.

The minister has already raised some questions about winter roads in connection with their maintenance and their completion. I want to ask the minister if he is able to tell us in these debates what the status of the winter road from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan will be for next winter. This is in the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca's riding, but it is very important to the residents of Fort McMurray, because they maintain a warm and cordial link with the community of Fort Chipewyan and other points north for the purposes of winter trade and commerce. All of my questions relating to roads north of Fort McMurray, Mr. Minister, relate to winter road issues, because I recognize some of the costs of a permanent all-weather road. My questions to the minister on this are these. Is there budgetary provision for any additional bridge work on the route from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan and from Fort Chipewyan north to Wood Buffalo national park and to Fort Smith? The minister will know the significance of that question, because a winter road can get in a lot earlier after freeze-up if there is any bridge infrastructure, and it expands the time of the road. In previous years bridges have been built across the Richardson and the Firebag rivers, and I'm wondering if there are any plans in the works for any other underlining infrastructure that will allow wider utilization of the winter road.

In addition, I understand that the minister has negotiated an arrangement with the Northwest Territories, the federal government, and the province of Alberta to keep a certain amount of winter road network opened north of Fort Chipewyan, and those northern routes have been opened in the winter. I wonder if the minister can report on the budgetary implications and whether he's able to continue that process again next winter.

Finally, there are winter roads that spin off from Fort McMurray, Janvier, and into the province of Saskatchewan. I'm hoping that the minister can tell us about those winter roads for next winter.

Mr. Chairman, the Member for Redwater raised the issue of vanity plates on the fronts of cars, and he raised the issue about going back to a double licence system. My questions in relation to the licensing of automobiles in this province are more fundamental than that. The minister now has introduced a one-year plan and a two-year plan for licence registration for motor vehicles that gets you a discount.

MR. TRYNCHY: It's not me.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's Municipal Affairs.

MR. GERMAIN: Okay. Fine. I hear the minister telling me that it's the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs that deals with the licences, and one can see how the confusion could come in, because the minister of transportation gets the revenue.

I ask the minister of transportation this then: is there any negative economic impact to the department of transportation if the Minister of Municipal Affairs was persuaded to issue a five-year licence at a further discount so that people could register their vehicles for five years? The average age of vehicles in the province of Alberta is now over seven years. People are simply not trading vehicles the way they used to, and they may enjoy the opportunity to buy a longer period of licence time in the process. I wonder if the minister has an assessment as to whether that would have an economic impact on the department.

Mr. Chairman, there are other people today who want to ask questions and make comments. I could go on, but if there is time at the end, I will take some more time, but at this time I will defer my speaking to other members. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My comments will be brief this afternoon. I have a couple areas that I would like to address, so I won't be taking a lot of the House's time this afternoon. I would like to, before I get into my specific questions, also compliment the minister. I find his office and his staff to be most co-operative. Anytime that I've had occasion to deal with him and his office, I've had very a favourable response, and I'm very pleased that he's able to co-operate as well as he does.

I have a couple specific questions, Mr. Minister, and one relates to the chip coating that is applied to highways. I'm sure the members of the House are quite familiar with this process. It's, I assume, done to preserve the surface of the road. I think in the long run it probably does a very good job of that. However, we have a specific situation on Highway 1 between Medicine Hat and Suffield that is causing a good deal of concern for people who frequently drive that road. Indeed, I have as MLA been dealing quite a bit with complaints regarding the recent installation. Over the summer of 1993 this chip coating surface was applied to that road, and for some reason there seems to be a good deal of sloughing of the chips off the road. As I mentioned, that is a road that is traveled a good deal, simply because it's the main access to CFB Suffield. There's a good deal of civilian employees who live in Medicine Hat who travel daily to the base in Suffield, so they have occasion to use that road on a very frequent basis. When this originally came up, I was advised that any claims for damages as a result of this process should be directed towards the contractor. So that is what I have been advising people who have contacted my office. However, I am in receipt of a copy of a letter that one of my constituents received from the contractor, and the contractor is claiming that they do not feel that they are responsible for any damage that may have occurred. So I wonder if you might be able to check into that and see if there is in fact any liability on the part of the contractor from this process.

The other thing that I would like to deal with has to do with the transportation grants that your department makes to municipalities. I understand that the city of Medicine Hat, for example, has a grant that comes from your department, and they use this grant for various projects throughout the city.

4:00

The reason I bring this subject up is that through the changes that were implemented with the last budget, we have changed the structure for grants from the province to municipalities from a conditional grant to unconditional grants. It seems to be fairly well received by the municipalities. In some of the other areas, where there are grants, certainly the municipal assistance grant, they now have the discretion to spend those dollars as they feel is best for the local circumstances. I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if your department has given consideration to the same kind of unconditional grants, a block funding of grants where the municipality does not have to have prior approval for projects that are going to be conducted throughout the year.

[Mr. Herard in the Chair]

I see that that would be a cost saving overall from a number of points of view. I think there would be a good deal of time saved both at the municipal level and at the provincial level, because it would seem to me that there's a good deal of paperwork that goes back and forth with the municipality developing plans, having those plans approved by the province, coming back and forth. If

we went to an unconditional grant structure, it would alleviate a lot of that perhaps needless back and forth paper. There may very well be a good reason for having the work approved in advance. That is my other question, Mr. Minister.

Really that's all I have to deal with this afternoon. I wonder if you might consider both of those areas, and whether you get a chance to respond today or later, either way would be fine with me.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

MR. ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KIRKLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the estimates this afternoon. I also appreciate the information that the minister gave. He answered a lot of the questions that I asked, and I thought he did it quite directly. That, of course, is always appreciated.

I want to start with my questions to the minister by just bringing a couple of statements out of the business plan into the discussion. When we looked at external trends, one of the areas that was identified as a contributor to the business plan itself was the fact that much of the highway system was built in the '60s and '70s and will require rehabilitation and reconstruction. I think the minister certainly is well aware of the other comment that I would extract under the heading of On The Horizon from the business plan, and it is: "A safe highway system will maintain a high priority in the business plan."

Now, having said that, I would like to move to an area that runs through that lovely city that I live in, Leduc, and talk a minute about the overpasses in the Leduc area. They were an example, as the minister pointed out in his business plans, of road construction of the '60s and '70s. We have access lanes to those highways from the north of Leduc and the south of Leduc that enter Highway 2 right at the bridge entrances themselves. Now, the merge lanes in both cases are very short, and you have very poor visibility. You do not have the opportunity to evaluate the road system behind you. I would ask the minister if his department has had a serious look at that overpass, whether there's been a traffic count done there recently. I would also ask the minister if there's a plan to address, correct, or improve what is perceived by most Leduc residents to be a very dangerous situation.

Just remaining in my constituency, I would like also to deal with Highway 60. Highway 60 is twinned from Devon across the North Saskatchewan River with the new bridge that was put in there a couple of years ago. That twinning ends at the north end of the Enoch reservation. I've looked at some long-term plans for the highways in that area. One plan, if I recall correctly, showed the highway from the Leduc weigh scales branching to the west to connect to Highway 60 and then run over the new bridges and circumnavigate the city of Edmonton to accommodate most of the truck traffic in that area. Now, I would ask the minister: is there a plan to carry on with that long-term plan I saw so many months ago when I sat on city council in Leduc?

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray addressed one problem that the Member for West Yellowhead brought to his attention, and I am going to expound a bit and give the minister some more specifics in that area so in fact he can be quite direct about the answers that he provides in this situation.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead had a concern about Highway 40. One of the areas he spoke about was the 15 kilometres that run south, as I understand it, from Grande Prairie. That stretch was promised to be paved, and I believe it was completed. The stretch that he had a concern with was the stretch of Highway 40 that runs from Grande Cache north near the mine.

His concern is: what is planned for that this year? It's presently graveled. The minister did allude in his initial opening comments of March 16, I believe it was, that they did have some improvements intended for Highway 40.

His other concern that he would like brought to the minister's attention was the highway from Hinton to Cadomin. There are about 12 or 14 Ks of road that have been paved there. The rest is oiled. He indicates that there are about a thousand miners and other travelers that use that road presently and wondered if the minister has given any thought to completing that stretch of the road with pavement.

I'll leave those concerns and move over to a personnel - I won't call it a problem - situation here. Now, the department has significant staff conducting survey work, generally in the spring, summer, and fall months. Those staff generally speaking, as I understand it, are not laid off, so there's a cost associated with carrying them. If we are to visit the business plans, there is a suggestion that we should move into more partnerships with private enterprise. I would ask the minister if he is in the process of considering or exploring privatizing that particular aspect of his department.

One of the areas that generates the most calls to my constituency office in Leduc is the solicitor general's highway representatives. Now, I can recall that the minister did address a concern that was brought to his attention very early after the June 15 election. I would suggest that we on occasion have to go back and revisit some of those issues. Just a reminder to the solicitor general's highway reps that we do have to be fair and we do have to be reasonable. The situation I'll put to the minister - I've had three phone calls on it, perhaps not a significant number - was that we seem to be a little heavy handed as far as the 10-hour limit is concerned. If you are logging more than 10 hours and you're not at the side of the road, you're subjected quite frequently to some heavy-handedness for not pulling over, yet if you pull over where the road is not really conducive to it, you are also chastised for that. So I would ask the minister if perhaps - just a gentle reminder that some common sense applied to these situations certainly will not hurt any of it.

The other area that has come to my attention through constituents is that there seems to be a lack of communication between the different jurisdictions as far as the solicitor general's highway reps are concerned. The situation that was put to me was that he was pulled over in one jurisdiction or one region and no sooner crossed the line than he was pulled over again. Time is money to these truckers. He felt that a simple phone call from, we'll say, region A to region B indicating that truck C had been stopped and was cleared to go and there really shouldn't be a concern would save the trucking industry money, and I would also suggest that it would probably go a long way to improving the public relations aspect of the solicitor general's highway reps.

One area that the minister spoke to - it was in response to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford - was the difference of increases and decreases between the rural and the urban aspects. Now, when I look at this budget, I see under rural, vote 2.4, that the '93-94 total was \$43,689,000. In '94-95 the total I show is \$47,770,000. The minister indicated that that was a decrease of 6.2 percent. I am having difficulty following his math on that. When I look at the urban side of that equation, vote 2.5 running down to 2.5.5, the '93-94 total was \$76,715,000, and in '94-95 we show a total of \$58,805,000. So if he would expound further as to why the figures I look at are somewhat different than the figures and the numbers that he is presenting, it would be appreciated.

4:10

The minister spoke of the internal audit. He indicated that it would be a more aggressive tool within his department over the next five or six years. I would commend him for that. I certainly think there's not a government department or agency that can't seek out efficiencies. I would ask him to take it a step further and be bold enough perhaps to take that \$335,000 that's associated with an internal audit and look at consulting that particular undertaking to the private enterprise. It would be my suggestion that in fact he will get a more objective look at it from the outside. I think every one of us is aware that when we work within areas in our comfort zones, we're not quite as harsh or stringent as we should be in some of those areas.

Under vote 2.2, looking at the construction and improvement of highways, there was a general decrease of 14 percent in this area. In my mind it would seem that it would be appropriate and also relative if we saw more of a reduction in the program planning and design management. As I understand these two departments, they really work hand in hand. One department, from a quick look, has a decrease of about 6 percent, the other about 14 percent. I would think there should be more of a relativity to those reductions, and I would ask the minister to expound upon that aspect of it.

I wanted to spend a minute on airports. I would quote from the last estimates review we had, when the minister stated:

We will look at pavement rehab on all 65 airports operated by communities, and we'll do that to protect the existing infrastructure, the same as we would on our highway network. We're going to go and be involved, as we always have, in a partnership with municipalities in regards to capital improvements on our community airstrips, and we look forward to working with them.

I would suggest to the minister and I would ask him if we have entered into some serious consultation with these municipalities, if these airstrips are very dear to their hearts. When we consider the mind-set of his government today and we look at the business plans that indicate that we would like to enter more partnerships, I would ask him what negotiations he's undertaken with these communities to assume full and total control of the airstrips. I think, as I indicated, it's a move in the direction that his government would like to step. I see there would be some savings, and you will find out exactly how valued these airstrips are to these communities.

Another area that I would like to spend a minute on is the land management aspect of the department. It's my understanding that the department administers a significant amount of land and that the actual inventory accounting of that land could be somewhat improved. I would ask the minister if an inventory of department land has been completed in the last year. I'd ask him if there's a mechanism in place to determine whether the land is surplus. Also, following up on that, I'd ask him if there is a plan to dispose of what is defined as surplus land in '94, and if so, what sort of projected proceeds we would receive from the sale of these lands.

The minister answered my question, not to my satisfaction, as far as the observation I brought to him in regards to rutting of the highways. Now, he gave me a scientific explanation that in fact the triaxle trailers really shouldn't cause any more concern or damage to the roads than the other axle, and that was based on some scientific study. Well, I want to deal with the practical side of it. It was the owner of a large trucking company that brought this to my attention. He suggested that visual observation should confirm exactly what I'm suggesting here, that being that the triaxle trailers are causing a lot of rutting. He used the area of High Level as a classic example. I would just reiterate to the minister that science certainly is exact most times and occasions.

If we have a problem with that type of trailer on the roads, then we should address it. The minister was innovative enough to have the trucking industry tie into a charge to help offset the repair of bridges and the decks on bridges. We may have to look at something in this area as well, I would suggest.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I will turn the floor over to one of my other colleagues in the House here to carry on the questioning of the minister.

MR. ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Three Hills-Airdrie.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a couple of quick questions. They'll probably demonstrate my ignorance when it comes to road construction, but I find it a very confusing topic. I would ask the minister's indulgence in taking a little time to explain the different types of road construction and the standards that have to be met and why it costs so much to build 15 or 16 kilometres of road inside my constituency. There are also the different types where you have to rip everything up and start from scratch versus putting in overlay. I'd like to know how they get to the determination on that decision, so that when I'm asked to participate with my municipal districts in discussions on this, I have a better handle on what needs to be done and why we need to spend as much money as we are spending.

On a separate issue, could the minister make a comment with regard to damage that's done to bridges and other surface parts of our roads by large trucks hauling logs? It has been a problem in some areas where logging trucks have damaged the bridges. Is there compensation back for that, and if not, why not?

The last issue I just wanted to ask him about was the interprovincial trade barriers between Alberta and Saskatchewan. I've had trucking companies come to me and complain that they are not allowed the same level playing field in Saskatchewan that we give Saskatchewan truck drivers over here. I don't know all of the details, Mr. Minister, but I know you know what I'm talking about. I'm wondering where we're going on interprovincial trade barriers with regard to the trucking industry in particular here, if you could make a comment on that.

Thank you.

MR. ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MR. BRACKO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to begin by saying that the twinning of the Yellowhead Highway has become a dream come true. It greatly benefits many Albertans and visitors, a very important step forward. I believe that in the past there were even three Members of this Legislative Assembly that died on that highway before it was twinned.

A question to the minister: how much has the traffic flow increased, if you have that information? And this perhaps should go to the economic development committee, but how has that benefited Alberta, if a study or information to that effect has taken place?

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

Moving on, I asked questions in the fall session on the end product specs. How is that proceeding? Is it now part of the complete Alberta picture? Are there still places in Alberta where the government forces companies to use government pits and so on? The end product specs, from what I understand – is it win/win, where the company can use their own products? That, of course, improves the road.

The second question on that is on the day labour paid for construction or road building in the northern part of the province. Has that changed over the last while to contract work, or are we still using the day labour, where you have them paid by the hour and needing a supervisor?

Next, I would just like to go back to the *Hansard* of March 9 and a statement made by the minister: "One member on that side, the Liberal Party, says that roads and bridges can wait." Mr. Chairman, I made that comment. As I look at the budget that the minister has for research, \$8.1 million, I guess my question is: why was that statement taken out of context?

4:20

My statement was made – and I'll just read it from *Hansard* of March 8.

In St. Albert, Mr. Speaker, I'm overwhelmed by the thousands of hours of their time and energies that volunteers give. They're involved in sports, service clubs, environmental protection societies, and in meeting human service needs in our community. Three weeks ago many volunteers, parents, and coaches gave of their time and energies to host a tournament for Special Olympics. It was extremely successful, as the athletes were recognized and honoured for their achievement and participation. In the same way, volunteers are heavily involved in the human service needs area. In this special area many volunteers give thousands of hours as they meet the needs of our community. This saves society hundreds of thousands of dollars and greatly improves the quality of life for many families, the backbone of our province.

Our community is greatly concerned about the proposed change of FCSS funding from social services to Municipal Affairs . . . Alberta needs leadership to prevent the loss of funding to FCSS. Roads and bridges can wait; human service needs cannot.

My comments were to the funding of FCSS, not to roads and bridges in the transportation budget. I want that clarified. Roads and bridges are very important to the infrastructure of our province and to the economic well-being, and I strongly support that. For taking my statement out of context, I would like an explanation from the minister. Human service needs are there. When there's a suicidal person, they need medical treatment. Money from FCSS I believe should go to this and be kept here, and that's the reference I made in this statement. So I would just like clarification of that.

Also, I've had a couple of calls from people in the Deputy Premier's constituency regarding highway 794, the curve near Westlock. They're concerned that there have been many accidents, and they would like to know how many people have died in that area, how many accidents have occurred, how many people were injured, and what action will take place to rectify that section of road. I'm sure it's the curve just before Westlock.

Highway 37, I believe in the minister's riding: there's concern about the traffic flow. Do you do a traffic count, and whereabouts is it in relation to other highways in the province? What traffic flow do you need to have the road either widened or looked at for changes that would make it safer? I know it's a top priority for the municipal district of Sturgeon and also the end by Onoway, which I believe hits your constituency.

Other calls, too, from people asking if highway 777 is listed to be paved in the next few years or if it's just going to remain as it is now.

The minister supplied us with information on the pavement management system, and I thank him for it. It gives us more insight into how things are done. I guess my only other comment would be: if we had other information on how priorities are chosen on new roads, if we could get a list of priorities so that

people have access to it, so that members would have access, we'd know where we stand on the list.

With that, I will conclude, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mayfield.

MR. WHITE: Got it. Very good. He's looking for the job permanently here, getting all those names right the first try. Very well done.

The questions today should come as no surprise, and they're a direct response to the handout today. It's an atechanical document titled *How the Department's Pavement Management System Contributes to Pavement Rehabilitation Programming Processes*. There's seldom coming from a technical department such an atechanical document. I'd like it to go on record, as it's obvious the minister would not be able to answer these questions right away, but certainly if he could get back, it would be good.

There's a pavement quality index indicated, and it's made up of a structural adequacy index, a visual condition index, and something called a riding comfort index. Could the minister be so kind as to put forward how that formula is translated into real numbers, therefore putting it into some kind of hierarchy of the roads in the province of Alberta, so that one can stand back and say that, yes, we're all being treated equitably; we can see where the requirements are.

There's another line in this minireport that says, "There is a minimum acceptable level of PQI [that is, the pavement quality index] which indicates a need for rehabilitation when it is reached." I'd like to know (a) what that number is and (b) certainly the utility of the road has to play some kind of determination of whether the road in fact should be repaired. It can't solely be placed on this numerically derived number, the PQI. Certainly there has to be something applied to the utility for perhaps the farmers in the area or for other uses, whether it be tourism or anything else. Certainly there has to be some road count numbers put to that.

The overall province – and this question stems also from the business plans and the lack of hard, measurable data. I'm talking about the number of kilometres of the primaries and secondaries that have been rehabbed and the various categories of rehab on each of those. Those should be able to be published now for the last year, because certainly it is a well-known fact. Your department should in fact know. Apply those numbers to it and say, "Lookit, this is what it costs us, or our best guess that it costs us, per kilometre." Therefore, in successive years you should be able to measure against that. Granted, they won't be perfect. We know that. But what you'll be able to do and therefore the House will be able to do is say, "Yes, in this area you're doing a good job; in that area perhaps you're not doing a good job." At least then you and your offices could focus in on some of those areas.

There are two things that the Member for Leduc brought up that I would like to reinforce, and one is the land management inventory. It's well known that the department must acquire quite a bit of property in order to expand some services throughout the province, and one must agree also that they have to be acquired sometimes early in the process, as opposed to late, in order to save the acquisition dollars. On the other hand, we are not in a state now where we can afford to keep those kinds of sums of inventory, recognizing that those inventories cost money. It will not show up in your accounts. It won't show up in the public accounts. It won't show up anywhere. But we're all well aware that having moneys set aside in land that is unproductive, either

in agriculture or in the capital cost of it, certainly costs the province money.

There should be – and I'm sure there is – a data base that will show where those properties are, and I'm sure every single one of those properties on the data base should have attached to it a utility factor, whether it's in the five-year plan or outside the five-year plan. I say to you that what should happen in that case, if it's beyond the five-year plan specifically, is that if the department can't lay claim to that piece of property for a specific use within the five years, then it should be subdivided and put to the offices of Public Works, Supply and Services to dispose of, at least that portion that will not be used. If it's beyond the five-year limit, it should in fact not be in the inventory, and that should not be a judgment call of the department internally. It should come directly to the minister to say, "Yes, you may keep these properties, even though they offend the rule for this and that reason."

4:30

Into public safety, into something that is really quite different than what I've said before. This is dealing with another concern that the Member for Leduc brought up first, and I'd really like to reinforce this. This is the success of two overpasses, going south on Highway 2 from Edmonton here, right at Leduc. Those are, in my opinion, perhaps the most dangerous on our main transportation corridors in the province of Alberta. That particular location is very, very difficult to pass at any one time when one is traveling without getting some kind of nervous reaction, because the sight lines are bad, the on-ramps and off-ramps are very short, and there's a fairly high traffic volume coming onto the highway and leaving the highway there. In fact, I would think it is one of the highest priorities on the length and breadth of Highway 2 and Highway 16 and Highway 1, the three main highways in this province.

The last question I'd address to the minister is perhaps also to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. These departments have a deliverance of hard services. There are measurable quantities. There are engineers involved. Oftentimes what you'd have to do to be able to work on some area, like the department has had to do – it's had to get away from new construction, is heavily into rehabilitation – is take those people and pool the resources. What I'm saying is merge the departments at some point in the future and use those engineers to the best advantage. Granted, they're not all the same kinds of engineers, but certainly you could, in the aid of downsizing. It certainly is possible. Both ministers have commented that they've been working diligently to reduce the management costs of their departments and keep the service levels up. This perhaps is one way that they may be able to do the province a service.

Thank you kindly for your time, Mr. Minister. I'd leave further questions to other members.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper. Oh, sorry. The hon. minister. [interjection]

MR. TRYNCHY: What's the matter?

MR. CHADI: I just wanted to ask a couple of questions; that's all.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, would you only be two or three minutes?

MR. CHADI: Yeah. There are just a couple of comments I want to make, a couple of questions.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Is that okay, hon. minister?
Okay, then. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for allowing me to make a couple of comments and a couple of questions with respect to the estimates this afternoon.

I want to first of all clarify a question, and want to know the answer to it, with respect to the heating fuel grants in program 4.4 specifically. It was on March 9, Mr. Chairman, when I rose in this Assembly and asked a question as to how many dollars are we expending towards this program and is it an effective program in this day and age. Well, the minister responded, and right out of *Hansard* it says, "Well, I can appreciate that they don't care about rural Alberta and the people living far away where they can't get natural gas." Well, it's not true at all. I am from a rural background, born and raised in the rural parts of this province.

My question; I'm going to ask it again. Within that category we spend I believe in the range of \$250,000, and then there's support services to the tune of \$50,000. That's a total of \$300,000 in that total subprogram. I agree with the concept of heating fuel grants, but it seems like a small amount of money that is going, I know, to a wide range of people in the north part of this province. Particularly, I would imagine, it would be the northern parts of this province. My question is: how many areas are we assisting and how many people are we assisting with this \$250,000 for remote area heating grants?

I can take, for example, the area that I'm most familiar with in the north, and that would be Fort Chipewyan. When you look at the population there being around 1,500, there are about 500 homes there. If it was only Fort Chip alone that this money was going to, why, that would be a paltry sum to each household. So I question how worth while the program really is and who's really benefiting from it. I mean, if each household gets something like \$10 or \$15 a year out of this thing, I hardly think it's worth it to continue. We either make a program that's worth while or forget about it. It's not worth spending \$300,000 if somebody's benefiting five bucks or 10 bucks a year on it.

Another question is: how is this grant being administered? Does it go through the fuel companies, the oil companies, or does somebody just apply for a grant to get something back on this home heating fuel? When I see support services of \$50,000 in the home heating fuel area and heating grants for \$250,000, Mr. Chairman, that's an awful lot of money if support services is just going to administer \$250,000. So I really wouldn't mind an answer to that, and I'm not being cute about it. I expect that the hon. minister would respond to me in a fashion of seriousness.

The next comment I'd want to make and question. When I asked about the Fort Chipewyan highway – I know my colleague the hon. Member for Fort McMurray touched on this as well. Again, the road from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan is a winter road. That winter road is being maintained by water trucks spraying water, most likely at night, and allowing it to freeze so the next day they have a smooth surface. I understand that, because the water would fill the holes and it would freeze quite nicely. But the fact of the matter is that what's happening is that it's usually quite warm. Particularly this winter, sometimes we get days when it's really warm out there, and the potholes don't freeze solid and they create even worse potholes. The problem up north, and particularly up north, is that when you put water in holes like that – that's what we dearly try to get away from in our road system in this province: water. That's what causes us the big problems, because when the water freezes it expands and causes those potholes. That's what creates those

potholes in the first place. So when we pour more water in there and then vehicles are pounding on that road all day long, why, you wasted your money for nothing. It doesn't serve a useful purpose.

What I'm saying is that quite clearly the terrain there is all sand. The Fort Chipewyan area, particularly between Fort Chip and Fort McMurray, is an ecosystem that is very unique in this province because there are sand dunes for miles. It's unbelievable. I mean, it looks like a desert up there, and that winter road is built on that sand. It's a sandy jack pine type soil. So all I'm saying is that perhaps we ought to utilize some of that material off the sides of the road that we graded off or maybe from the ditches or whatever the case may be. Maybe have a bobcat go through, or something like that, and then put that material back in those holes instead of putting water in those holes, because the water is doing us nothing. I know when you put sand in the roads or the same material that the road is built from, it's going to get pounded out anyway, but perhaps not as badly as when you put only water in those holes. That's not solving the problem, and I think we can get to the root of the problem by looking at a different strategy. That's all I'm saying, Mr. Chairman.

Lastly I want to talk about – and I know I said I'd make it brief, so I will. With respect to 2.8, dedicated revenues, I know we alluded to this in our previous estimates debate, on March 9 I believe. That was with respect to the surplus of \$45 million. That amount of money is surplus, and I understand that there was \$40 million that we transferred to the infrastructure program. My question is: how do we decide that these dedicated revenues are going to actually be brought into this department? When I look at the amount of money that is coming in from the vehicle registration/licensing, the total coming in in 1994-95 is \$122,439,000. Did we just kind of decide that's how much we needed? Or is there a formula that was used that only this portion of money is the dedicated revenue, based on a certain percentage? That's my question.

4:40

I note from the Budget '94 documents, particularly page 44, the motor vehicle licences, the revenues in that department are estimated at \$159 million this year, Mr. Chairman. So \$159 million versus the \$122,439,000; I suspect there's some kind of a formula there. If there is, where is the other revenue? Does it just stay within the general revenue fund, or is it dedicated elsewhere from there? That's what struck me as being rather odd.

Another one was 2.8.3, other departmental revenue, being \$24,100,000. In that category there – it is in the capital investment category of revenue – I'm wondering what sort of capital created us this revenue, and I'd like an explanation with respect to that category within that subprogram. Did we sell something off that generated us some revenues? I note that in the '93-94 estimates we saw other departmental revenue at \$25 million, so we're about a million dollars shy this year. Is it something that was extraordinary? Give us an explanation, Mr. Minister, as to exactly what that's about.

Mr. Chairman, I've got a couple more questions. It's unfortunate. I note that I did promise the minister some time, so I'm going to rest my comments now and allow the minister.

Thank you very much.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Transportation and Utilities, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to file copies of the document tabled by the Minister of Transportation and Utilities this day for the official records of the Assembly.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member. You all heard the report. All in favour, say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, if any? Carried.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 10
Appropriation (Lottery Fund)
Interim Supply Act, 1994

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Provincial Treasurer, I move third reading of Bill 10.

MR. WHITE: Sir, we didn't get a lot of time to speak of lotteries the last time, so I'll take a few minutes of the House's time to finish off debate in third reading.

This particular Bill is not difficult to deal with. It's a pretty well straightforward expenditure of funds or allotment of funds to keep the lotteries going until, of course, the moneys can be found in the new budget. The difficulty I have is this. There seems to be something – and I cannot find where it is in the estimates, certainly. It's just not there. I can't find where the sums are expended when you get to Alberta Lotteries, which is a nongovernment body. It doesn't show up in public accounts. To my knowledge there isn't any filing in any corporate way. It's filed in the society under the Societies Act, I assume. They don't make any money but they can hold moneys. This side understands that there's a great deal of money being held there until such time as, I assume, the minister in charge would want that money disseminated. As we saw on at least two occasions in the past, those moneys have been disseminated pretty well at the will of the minister in charge of dispensing them.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

We find that most distasteful, most distasteful, from our point of view, not because those moneys are simply not reported but because there can be in the minds of the public something that's perhaps not done in the public interest, when that may in fact not be the case. But the facts are that these numbers aren't reported. They seem to be held in abeyance, and there is no accounting that we can find on it. We have a great deal of difficulty with that, and I would hope that in future years that will be rectified.

I thank you kindly for your time, sir.

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Assembly ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

Bill 8
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1994

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. the Provincial Treasurer, I would move third reading of Bill 8.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

DR. PERCY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to address Bill 8. Again we're brought forward an appropriations Bill, an interim supply Bill that covers approximately 38 percent of the budget. As this side had noted earlier, there is really no need for an interim supply Bill of this magnitude. Although we raised this issue extensively in our comments, it was not addressed to date by the Provincial Treasurer.

Let me reiterate several points. First, here we have a pig in a poke. We have the lines set out there with extensive sums being expended, but we don't know exactly which projects they're going to. I'm sure if the Provincial Treasurer makes an appearance and hears us discussing this and arguing critically against it, he will say that we're voting against this project, this project, this project. Well, that's quite a significant feat of imagination, since when I read this document, Mr. Speaker, it is not a line-by-line item; it's a blank cheque. We do not know where the revenues are going, the timing of those expenditures, how they were derived. So although it's great rhetoric on the Treasurer's part, it has absolutely no substance.

In proceeding to address this, let me discuss an issue that I've mentioned time and time again, and I will see hon. members' heads hit the desk as I talk about net budgeting. There are probably two people interested in it, myself and possibly my wife – and the hon. Member for Stony Plain – but it's an important point. Let me first of all just read to you what net budgeting is. It's set out very clearly in the estimates. It's also set out in the element details. It

provides an alternative basis of authorizing spending. For programs providing services where the user-pay principle is appropriate and where the level of expenditure and revenue is directly related to the program's volume of activity, the annual budget is set at the estimated net amount of expenditure for the program. If demand for the program grows and provides increased revenue, the department has the flexibility to respond with no increase in net cost to the government. If demand for the program diminishes and revenues decline, then program managers must reduce expenditures accordingly.

If you listen to that and understand the full import, it's actually quite frightening. It means, for example, that if the hon. provincial minister of highways through an order in council increases gasoline fees, there will be an array of expenditures undertaken. It will not go through the Legislative Assembly here for review, because we vote on the net estimates. There's a department that's spending half a billion dollars, and we're assessing the net estimates of \$20 million. There is a flypaper effect in government; money generated in a particular department will stay in that department. Say that in fact gasoline taxes go up through an order in council. Who is to say that the best use of those dollars is within transportation to pave yet another highway? Who is not to say that the best use of that money is in education or in health? But because it's dedicated revenue, it will stay in transportation. I don't think that is appropriate, Mr. Speaker. It should be the will of the House to assess where on the margin those dollars go.

4:50

Let me also point out, when you look at this, what if the program diminishes and revenues decline? Highways in this province provide a wide array of services: to individuals

commuting within cities, for the carrying of commerce, for the shipping of our exports out of the province. Say that economic conditions decline and dedicated revenues to the department fall. Are we then to say, "Well, roads which we thought ought to be paved will not be paved because the dedicated revenues have declined"? Would we in fact then put barriers to the export of our goods? Would we erect barriers to the flow of commerce within our cities? It really doesn't make much sense, Mr. Speaker.

In one sense, you can see that for businesses it makes sense. They deal with profit centres where they provide goods, and they capture entirely the benefits from those goods. Government, on the other hand, members, provides an array of services. In many instances those services cannot be provided by the private sector, and there is an array of benefits that accrue to both individuals and to society as a whole. This in a sense views what government does as being purely captured by the people using the particular road or whatever is generating that dedicated revenue. There are relatively few investments that a government undertakes in capital in which the benefits accrue just to a narrow group that you can specifically target. Dedicated revenue in this context here presumes that you can. It presumes, then, that as these dedicated revenues rise and fall, the earmarking that's associated with this is appropriate and that dollar that's generated in that department belongs in that department.

As I've noted earlier, Mr. Speaker, if we were to pursue that concept to its logical conclusion, the Department of Energy would be an incredibly wealthy department, and I'm sure it would have a very large administrative superstructure. This has to be viewed as generating the seeds of a lot of administrative overheads. Because as soon as you allow a government department to have its own revenue source, you remove some of the constraints that lead to smoothing and reducing the administrative structure, and that's what the Legislature is here for. That is what opposition members are here for in particular: to ensure the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed. This shift to net budgeting then in a sense removes our ability to do a fundamental portion of our job. You tie that together with the fact that we vote on appropriations and a total for operating and a total for capital, and there is a significant loss of control or, again, accountability. It is the role of the opposition to be constructive in its approach to try and ensure that pressure is brought on government to do good. That is our job, so that governments perform.

In a sense, now we're losing control of our function in that regard, and I think there is a severe problem with net budgeting that has to be addressed within the Legislature in debate. It's very difficult to bring it up because it's viewed as a partisan issue. I would argue that this is not a partisan issue. This is an issue of how funds are allocated within government according to the greatest need. Simply because revenues are generated in sunk costs on our roadways through gasoline taxes doesn't necessarily mean those funds belong there. They could belong in education. They could belong in health care. They could belong in advanced ed. That is an issue that has to be tackled.

The justification for this is in a sense to try and build efficiency into the system, but the type of efficiency that's proposed here works very well within a firm providing a clearly defined service or commodity in which the firm itself captures all of the benefits. Once you have spillovers and benefits accruing to a wide range of individuals in our society, then net budgeting loses a little of its kick, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is an issue that has to be addressed.

Now we're looking at this set of appropriations. I looked at, for example, the component in Transportation and Utilities. We know that there is a significant amount of dedicated revenue there,

\$480 million. We know that a significant amount of that dedicated revenue will accrue to the province in the first three months. So they could easily have had here zero zero and could have funded everything out of the dedicated revenue. I mean, we don't know what choice they made, how they made the allocation that no dedicated revenue was going to be applied to this particular component of \$5,321,000 and the \$20,000 on the capital investment. There's no rhyme or reason, Mr. Speaker, as to how these numbers are generated, particularly when you're dealing, then, with a department that has significant dedicated revenues.

So there is a problem here, and we're just marching down the road. We're not addressing it and asking: is it appropriate that money that is generated in government stay within a particular department because the perception is that it generated it, when in fact the responsibility of government is, as the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services always says, high needs? Well, one would expect, then, that when revenue comes into any department, it goes to high needs. I fail to see why \$480 million in gasoline taxes necessarily goes to the department of transportation as a high need when there are schools being closed, when there are hospital beds being closed, and when we're cutting back extensively in an array of areas where government ought to be. So I do have serious concerns. I think it is an issue that ought to be addressed, and I don't think we're doing that.

With regards to the specific elements of Bill 8 I would again say that if we look at Advanced Education and Career Development – and I could do this department by department, but I will spare hon. members from those 17 steps – how do we know which projects are going forward? We know many capital projects are undertaken in the spring, but these things have just simply been prorated. So this is, in a sense, just a fictional accounting. It's a way of generating money just on a straight-line basis. Surely there could be more documentation provided for us passing these supplementary accounts, just saying: these are the projects that are going on the front end in the first quarter and will be funded. It's not difficult to do it, because every minister knows exactly what's going forward in the first quarter, particularly in capital projects. It's not asking a lot, but what is being asked of the opposition is to basically write a blank cheque. This side of the House, Mr. Speaker, has serious concerns as to just writing blank cheques, because often when you write a blank cheque, you get stung and the account's cleaned out.

Now, I have tried to address these issues in a nonpartisan, in a dispassionate manner, as is my general demeanour, but I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that what's going to happen is that at about 5:15 p.m. the hon. Provincial Treasurer will emerge, and we'll be, you know, witness to something that we often see on *World of Nature*. For example, you see a Gila monster: when provoked, the flaps come out, a lot of noise, then suddenly it just comes back to its normal shape, then kind of moves on. Or a puffer fish, when provoked, will expand, with angry demeanour, then comes back and goes on. It's a great show, but it doesn't have a lot of long-run payoff, and occasionally the puffer fish is devoured. Or one could in fact go to a ruffed grouse . . .

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

MR. JONSON: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Order. The hon. Minister of Education is rising on a point of order.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to *Beauchesne* 23(i) . . .

MR. GERMAIN: No. It's Standing Orders.

MR. JONSON: Standing Orders. I'm sorry. In 23(i). I'm a little rusty at this.

I really on that basis have to take issue with the hon. member referring to a member of this House as some other species, particularly when he is not here to defend himself. I think this is not appropriate at all.

5:00

DR. PERCY: A point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister has identified the absence of a particular member.

MR. SPEAKER: Perhaps the hon. member might like to reconsider his characterization.

DR. PERCY: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't in any way referring to the hon. Treasurer as one of those but to the demeanour on occasion when we enter into an extended round of partisanship on various items. I would just say that many of these issues have to be fundamentally nonpartisan because we're talking about the financial health of the province. We're talking about an economy that is highly volatile. We still have a significant deficit, and collectively we're groping for mechanisms and vehicles to allow us to address the deficit while at the same time leaving the province with the ability to provide the essential services one elects a government to do: education, advanced education, and health care. So in no way were my comments about demeanour to represent a characterization of the hon. Provincial Treasurer, but on occasion there is a demeanour that leads one to believe that we're seeing nature world at work.

Debate Continued

DR. PERCY: So I think, Mr. Speaker, these issues are nonpartisan. The issue of net budgeting, the whole issue of appropriations, and that we now vote on just operating and capital are worthy of debate and ought to be considered. I would hope that the hon. government members would discuss this in caucus, the issues of: does this send the right signals, and is there not a flypaper effect in government? Because we've seen it. Just administrative bloat emerges if there are not the checks and balances that one ought to see. When you can have your own profit centre and generate your own revenues, there is a set of incentives there that is not very healthy.

As I say, the fundamental role of a Treasurer or a finance minister is to allocate dollars on the basis of high needs, because as we've been told time and time again, that's where the funds ought to go: high needs. As soon as you start dedicating and earmarking revenue, you move away from the principle that funds are allocated on the basis of highest social return, and that ought to be what drives the allocation of expenditures in this Assembly.

Where do we get the greatest social return for a buck? I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that the highest social return has to be education, advanced education, health care and that as soon as we dedicate, we start moving away from that principle that we put dollars where they yield the highest social return, because the private sector will do what it ought to do to generate profits. There are areas of government that are not driven by profit. They can be run efficiently, but their role is to deal with those types of investments, those types of programs that yield in some cases both private benefit to individuals but have a wide array of social benefits that accrue to society as a whole. I view, then, the move to earmarking as posing particular problems there.

Thank you. I conclude my comments.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper.

MR. CHADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, want to rise and speak to Bill 8 and to the appropriation of almost 3 and a half billion dollars in interim supply. I want to express a concern that I've continuously expressed, and now that we're talking about appropriation, I want to make it clear that the process isn't appropriate. The process of appropriation ought to come after the estimates have been completed.

I know that the budget has come in at somewhat of a later time than it ought to have. Because of the fact that the budget has come up and our year-end is March 31, we would have to go into appropriation to borrow sufficient funds or approve sufficient funds so that we could maintain our expenditures for a period of time. I understand that our estimates should be concluded within 25 days of the date of the introduction of the budget. That would clearly take us, Mr. Speaker, to somewhere around mid-April or nearing the end of April when our fiscal year-end is March 31.

So the process has to change. I think somewhere along the line we've got to tighten that up a little bit so that we're not going into appropriation anymore. I think it causes us delays and it costs us money when we start to think about having to appropriate or get some interim supply or interim financing, if you will. So that is my concern, and I'm glad that I'm able to express that concern into the record once again.

Now, with respect to Bill 8 itself and the appropriation, I want to speak about how money can now transfer from one program to another program within a certain department at the will of a minister. A minister could just say, "Well, we've set aside or budgeted this amount of money for this program, and that's the amount of money that we're going to spend, but if we need it somewhere else, we're going to be able to take those funds and move them around as I see fit." I think, Mr. Minister, that flies in the face of the budgeting process itself.

We've just finished talking about transportation and debating the transportation estimates in this House this afternoon. We debated program after program and the different references within the subprograms, and there were allocations of funds to each one of those different subprograms. It just clearly means that the budgeting process, first of all, is taking its course. We've set aside a certain number of dollars for each one of these, because based on past experiences and based on what we think is going to happen in the future, this is how much we feel will be expended within that program. That is the correct process.

To go along throughout the year and say, "Well, you know, we figure we ought to take more out of here and put it into here, and we ought to maybe not spend so much in a different category" – times are changing so fast, Mr. Speaker, one cannot expect that expenditures are going to happen in the same way. Perhaps maybe revenues aren't going to come in in the same way, and I think we've noticed that over the last 10 years. Revenues have declined because of us overestimating certain areas or certain sectors of our resource revenues, oil for example. When we thought that oil was going to be \$25 a barrel or \$30 a barrel or so on, it goes down to somewhere around the \$10, \$11 mark. See, that throws it way out of whack. So when we're talking about these, there are some things that you just can't rely on to be actual fact.

So what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that when we budget a certain amount for that category, that's the amount of money we should spend in that category, not any more and not move it around. I know that within my own companies if I need certain funds for some category or event and it's just not budgeted for, then I don't do it. I think we are the stewards of the funds of the people of Alberta. Here we are. We're taking care of that.

We're responsible for it. We're here to say to the people of the province of Alberta: this is the budget estimates; this is how much we're going to spend, and this is where we're going to spend them. Each one of us as MLAs sits in this Assembly, and we debate them, and we debate them because we are told this is how much we need and this is where we're going to spend them. On behalf of our constituents we either approve them or express our disapproval or our disagreement. In any event, they get passed.

So we have to learn to live with what we've budgeted for in each category. Otherwise, the budget process is just no use. Why bother with a budget at all then? We cannot continue to expend funds on an ad hoc basis, and that's exactly what it'll turn out to be when we say, "Well, at the whim of a department head these funds can transfer from one area to another." Well, that's ad hockery as far as I'm concerned, and there's no basis for a budget at all then. We might as well have just put all those funds in that category and just left it there and let the minister deal with it as he sees fit. That is not the process that ought to take place.

5:10

My colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud was talking about net budgeting, and I know that when we sat in this House and debated the estimates of transportation, I recall distinctly the minister of transportation saying something to the effect that we were going to utilize any surplus funds in his department to go towards further expenditures for road building or road maintenance or whatever or what have you. You see, that's the problem, Mr. Speaker. That's what got us into a \$30 billion mess in the first place: spending for the sake of spending. We didn't really need something, it was never budgeted for, but heck, we've got the dollars, so why don't we blow it and blow it quickly. I think that's wrong.

I think that rather than move it between departments, like some may advocate – I suppose that in some departments, perhaps education or perhaps social services that may require some surplus funds, that could take place, but I think, more importantly, that those funds ought to go to pay down the debt. We've accumulated that debt based on the lavish spending practices of the past. So any surplus funds ought to go towards paying down the debt, and that has to be first and foremost in the minds of each member of the cabinet. If each one of the members of cabinet thought that way, I think you would see a wiser, a meaner, a leaner group. You'd see a lean government, one that is seriously interested in reducing its debt. Reducing debt would mean reducing the amount of debt service as well, which would ultimately mean more money in the general revenue fund.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the appropriation itself. When we talk about \$3.55 billion – this is the appropriation in Bill 8 – that's a great deal of money. This represents about three months' worth of expenditures from within the budget that we put together, which we expect we're going to expend throughout the period of 12 months, or one whole year. Now, again, there's Bill 9, which is probably going to come up right away. Of course, we went through Bill 10, so that's another \$75 million that was there. The total appropriation was \$4.3 billion. Within Bill 8 itself the appropriation represents over three months' worth of expenditures. We've got an overall budget of \$12,634,000,000. I think the interim supply for fiscal 1994-95 is required for perhaps not more than a month, maybe a month and a half, I suspect no more than a billion dollars, yet we went for the whole gusto here. We went for three full months. We went for maybe more than that. A third of our budget is being called for within this interim supply, and bear in mind that this interim supply is being asked for without the benefit of the completion of the estimates debates.

I just have difficulty with that. I think the process is wrong. We've got to think about how much we're applying for for this interim supply when it's not required. It brings questions to my mind as to why we're doing it. Why are we going for so much?

Bill 8

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 1994

Bill 9

Appropriation (Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, Capital Projects Division) Interim Supply Act, 1994

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair hesitates to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Roper. However, Standing Order 61(5) requires that the Chair put all questions to the House on the appropriation Bills presently before us.

[Motion carried]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I should have had more time to review my procedures here, but I would like to suggest that we have another Bill to deal with.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. Perhaps there might be an opportunity to give the hon. Government House Leader some time, because it's the Chair's understanding that the hon. Opposition House Leader would like to ask the Assembly for unanimous consent to do something. The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and ask the co-operation of the House to assist in a procedural matter for which there is precedent. I'm asking that the House pass the motion that I've just distributed requesting that the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan replace the Member for Lethbridge-East on tonight's Department of Health designated supply subcommittee. There is precedent; that's been done before. The Member for Lethbridge-East has been called away to a constituency matter. If the House would accept that, we'd appreciate that greatly.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Prior to asking for the decision on the motion, the House would have to agree to waive Standing Order 57(1) to accomplish this. Is there agreement in the Assembly for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 57(1) so that the motion can be put?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

Moved by Mr. Mitchell:

Be it resolved that Mrs. Abdurahman be appointed to the designated supply subcommittee dealing with the estimates of the Department of Health to replace Dr. Nicol.

[Motion carried]

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it has been quite an active week, and I'm sure that hon. members are anxious to get back to their duties or to their constituencies.

[At 5:19 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

