

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 16, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, although he actually needs no introduction, Dr. Allan Warrack, a former member of our Legislative Assembly for the Three Hills constituency from 1971 to 1979, who I am proud to say now resides in the constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Allan Warrack is a constituent in one of the best constituencies, in the best city, in the best province, and the best country in the world. Mr. Warrack is a professor of managerial economics at the University of Alberta. He is accompanied by three of his MBA students: Kathryn Wood, Patti McIntosh, and Richard Dixon. They're seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I ask them to rise now and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a distinct honour for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a distinguished Canadian whom I have admired and respected for many years. Alexa McDonough is the Member of Parliament for Halifax and the leader of Canada's NDP. She's an articulate and passionate voice in the Parliament of Canada for many issues. Most impressive, however, is her strong and principled defence of public health care. She is in Edmonton today as part of a national campaign to listen to the concerns of all Canadians regarding the state of our health care system. Ms McDonough is in your gallery along with her assistant, Gary Evans, and I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm Alberta welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a petition to be presented to the Legislature today which a number of students and young people across the province have signed in support of Bill 11.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition supporting public health care in Alberta urging the government of Alberta to stop promoting private hospitals and "undermining public health care." This is signed by 220 residents of Alberta from Edson, Jasper, Vegreville, and Cold Lake.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly. This petition urges the government to "stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]." This petition has 224 signatures on it, and the individuals come from Fort McMurray, St. Paul, Cold Lake, Ponoka, and Lacombe.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by 209 individuals, most of them from the Cold Lake area, and they are urging the government of Alberta to "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that reads:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

It contains 218 names, which brings our total to – what? – 80,000, 90,000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table before the Assembly a petition comprised of page after page after page of signatures from the residents of Edson who are urging the Legislative Assembly to have the government "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in Alberta. This brings today's total to over 1,000 more ordinary, everyday Albertans who are opposed to this government's private health care initiative.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition with 1,111 names on it. All of these 1,111 Albertans are opposed to Bill 11, and they petition this Assembly to "pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and ask that the petition I tabled last week be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon as well to request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to protect, support, and enhance public health care in Alberta and to ban for-profit, private hospitals from receiving public dollars.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on public health care and the undermining of it and what's happening with it be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to protect, support, and enhance public health care in Alberta and to ban for-profit, private hospitals from receiving public dollars.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday in proper form regarding the public health care system be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition with respect to support for public health care that I read yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday to the Assembly regarding the protection of our public health care system be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative

Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Bill 18

Alberta Personal Income Tax Act

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will do a number of things. It's being seen as the most significant tax reform in the country, and in the process of the bill itself we will be looking at significantly increasing basic exemption levels and also spousal exemption levels up to 90 percent. We will be the first province to kill bracket creep. We will also be introducing a single rate of tax. Albertans will be the first Canadians who will be able to work overtime or become upwardly mobile or work harder without being punished at a greater tax rate.

Mr. Speaker, the other element on the bill will allow at the first quarter for the government to adjust the single rate, which will be presented at 11 percent, to either adjust that downwards or move basic exemptions upwards or a combination of the two.

Those are the exciting elements of this particular bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

1:40

Bill 19

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I also beg leave to introduce Bill 19, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2000. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This is another milestone, as it clears the way for the axing of the 8 percent deficit elimination surtax that was brought in in 1987. That will be gone this year, accelerating that commitment by one year.

Both of these bills represent the ongoing commitment of our Premier and this government in that in Alberta the only way taxes are continuing to go is down.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, this bill makes a number of changes to the Provincial Court Act, as well as amending the Provincial Offences Procedure Act, the Court of Queen's Bench Act, and repeals the Surrogate Court Act.

One of the key recommendations arising out of last year's justice summit dealt with simplifying the justice system. This bill will assist us in doing that by making courts more accessible and court cases less costly for Albertans.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

DR. PANNU: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table 11 letters and appropriate copies. These letters oppose Bill 11. They come from Rimbey, Eckville, Ponoka, Calgary, and Edmonton. One of the letters is in fact from the Canadian Federation of University Women.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first are letters from Shannon O'Donoghue of Banff and Dr. Millard of the Canmore medical clinic. Both are opposed to the Spray Lakes development in Kananaskis.

The second tabling I have is a petition signed by 27 people from the Slave Lake area who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to end the policy "permitting hazardous wastes to be transported into Alberta from outside Canada and delivered to Swan Hills Waste Treatment Plant."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In trying to keep up with all the correspondence opposing Bill 11, I'll table nine in one shot here and just simply read the names of those objecting to Bill 11 and the health care changes: Ruth Elliott, Karen Effa, Ron Clarkson, Allan Effa, Laurel Ambrose, Eldred Stamp, Robert Lawrence, Meaghan Reid, Warren Bard.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is from Mr. Harold Moore from Fairview, Alberta, who wants to know why "the PC party is inviting defeat in the next election over Bill 11."

My second tabling is the approved surgical procedures that can currently be done within this province without Bill 11 that are in the bylaws of the College of Physicians and Surgeons right now, and those were part of the Bill 37 review and the more recent update of those procedures. There are about 170 that can now be done, minor surgical procedures in nonhospital surgical facilities within this province right now.

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I have two tablings. The first tabling is the annual report of Economic Development Edmonton as well as a summary of their plans for the future. Unfortunately, I only have three copies of this report, but I understand that other copies can be obtained directly from EDE or via their new web site which was launched. In particular, they refer to the growth in Edmonton in terms of housing starts and retail sales in preparation for the 2001 World Championships in Athletics.

The second tabling I have is yet another analysis done by Mr. Brad Severin of BDO Dunwoody showing the lack of fairness in the government's flat tax proposal as well as the lack of planning with the imposition of this supposed simple single rate. It shows that the distribution of benefits is very unfair and that for the middle-income earners in Alberta to receive a benefit, we would have been much better served if we'd stayed with the existing tax system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table appropriate copies of a special issue of the Capital health *Connections* staff newspaper, Meningococcal Immunization: An Enormous Task, An Outstanding Achievement. By the time the campaign ended on February 28, it closed out at 80 percent of that target group, over 168,000 individuals had received the vaccination. It was one of the largest public vaccination campaigns ever undertaken in Canada.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 35 students from Dr. Elliott school in Linden, Alberta. They're accompanied today by teachers Mrs. Mary Hughes, Mrs. Linda Wiens, Mrs. Alison Ibbotson, as well as a host of parents that include Chuck Tomlinson, James Klassen, Darin Esau, Katie Peters, Laurie Klassen, Jackie Koot, Ernie and Connie Neufeld, Shelley Griesbach, Lynn Regehr, Kerry Eitzen, Robbie Fyn, Norma-Jean Swain, Kevin Christiansen, Sandy Courtney, and Chris McDougall. I'd like to ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly teachers and students from the Rosedale Christian school. The school is located in Crooked Creek, which is in the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency. Along with teacher Roger Klassen, we have parents and helpers Mr. Stephen Friesen, Mrs. Ethel Eidse, Mrs. Marilyn Friesen, Mr. Louis Eidse, and nine students from the school group. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask the students, teachers, and parents to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two distinguished gentlemen from my constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti, each of whom has a lengthy record of community service and community involvement. I would like to introduce John Simpson, who is a businessman in the city of Grande Prairie and currently is also serving as chair of the Mistahia regional health authority, and also Mr. Dennis Grant, who is now retired but was superintendent of the Grande Prairie and district Catholic school board. He also serves on the Mistahia Regional Health Authority Board. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you a friend and a constituent from Calgary-Fish Creek, Harvey Cenaiko. Harvey works for Calgary's finest police department and is a member of the Calgary regional health authority. I'd ask Harvey to stand and receive a warm welcome from all of the members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three university and college students who are in the gallery today. They are Blake Robert, Kyle Franz, and Erin King. These three people have been working diligently in the name of clarity and honesty to make sure that Albertans understand the intent and purpose of Bill 11. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you and to the Members of this Legislative Assembly 27 members of the Rotary Club of north Edmonton. Today was quite an exciting day. Usually we bring guests to speak to us at our meetings and luncheons, and today we brought the club to the Legislative Assembly to listen to the Speaker of this Assembly at our meeting.

I'd like to inform some of the members here of some of the community services that our club is involved with. Once a week we donate a luncheon to a school which is in need in our end of town. We also donated \$55,000 for the furnishing of the north Edmonton health centre. We're involved weekly in different things with the Boys and Girls Club, northeast patrol, Crime Stoppers, and Remembrance Day in the Beverly site in northeast Edmonton. At Christmastime we decorated some of the trees at the north Edmonton health centre, which we'll keep doing for the next few years. We're involved in very many things in a lot of schools.

Mr. Speaker, members of my club are in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, one of the members of that particular Rotary Club is a former member of the Canadian House of Commons and a distinguished veteran of Canada's participation in the second war, Mr. Bill Lesick.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and introduce two individuals from the political science faculty at the University of Alberta. They are currently studying the representation of women in elected office and specifically focusing on women in the Alberta Legislature. They're here today to see that representation in action. I would ask Linda Trimble and Ruby Hussein to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I've just been informed that in the gallery today are representatives from River Glen school. We have teachers and group leaders Ms Janice Dempsey, Miss Shelly Klotz, and Mrs. Gwen Pozzolo, and we have also parents and helpers Mrs. Mary Resta and Mrs. Shauna Shanks. They are accompanied by, I believe, 54 students from River Glen school. We're delighted to have them here today.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly several guests who are seated both in the public gallery and in the members' gallery today. They are Morag Rempel, chairperson of AUPE local 6, as well as six members of the AUPE Committee on Political Action, and they are

Tom Fuller, Bill Pollard, Roberta Allen, Ron Whan, Don Westman, and Robin Filmer.

As well, seated in the galleries today are Irene Payne, Jean Rogers, Jean Elchuk, Tina Wiebe, Chris Wiebe, Augustina Joyce, Merrill Stewart, Linda Stewart, and Reverend Dr. Charles Garbovitsky. They were all present outside at the citizens' vigil.

I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Premier met with representatives from the Alberta Medical Association in a desperate attempt to save Bill 11. It's clear that physicians in this province aren't buying into this government's propaganda campaign on this legislation. In fact, there appears to be nobody in Alberta buying into the government's spin, except perhaps their own spin doctors. My questions are to the minister of health, who also attended the meeting, I understand. Can the minister indicate what four points of progress were made that he reported upon leaving the meeting this morning?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we certainly did meet with representatives of the Alberta Medical Association, and they raised a number of issues with us. First of all, they are concerned with respect to funding. They want more funding of the health care system and the additional access to doctors' services that would come with that. We indicated to them that we have made a major commitment to increase funding some 21 percent over the next three years. We are funding at the top level in Canada on an age adjusted basis, but certainly we recognize that they want more funding for the system.

Secondly, they indicated and they have on other occasions indicated that they're very concerned about increasing the physician supply, and I would note that we have worked co-operatively with the AMA – and I think they have been at other meetings appreciative of this – in developing an overall physician resource plan so that when we do plan for additional medical positions in universities, we will be doing so on a rational basis, Mr. Speaker. Further to the doctor supply, we indicated that we had made a significant move this year in adding funds for internships, which has gone over, I think, very well.

They also talked about their desire or their feeling that they did not have enough status or a big enough role within the regional health authority system at present. So we did discuss those topics, Mr. Speaker.

In addition, we did actually talk about some of the clauses in Bill 11 and what the potential was for considering amendments.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the minister be addressing the concern that I also understand was raised regarding the disclosure of all private contracts, including labs, including food services, including communications consultants hired for spin doctoring, all of those contracts that are raised by the regional health authorities?

MR. JONSON: Well, if I heard the hon. leader correctly, Mr. Speaker, I don't recall any concerns about the communication methods of regional health authorities being raised at this particular meeting.

With respect to the items in the bill that were discussed, certainly

one of the proposed amendments that we discussed and we agreed to consider is that they suggested the legislation should require that a contract spell out what enhanced goods and services will be part of any contract and the terms and conditions around that. Quite frankly, we have to look at that more carefully, Mr. Speaker, but I think that is doable, and I indicated that to the AMA this morning.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is the minister willing to table the amendments which the Alberta Medical Association proposed at the meeting?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, this was a quiet, sedate, and formal meeting, but it wasn't so formal that we got down to dotting the i's and crossing the t's of draft amendments. If and when there are amendments to Bill 11 – and I would like to also go on and talk about some more – they will certainly be tabled with the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we even get on to amendments in the question period, we better first of all move to second reading stage.

Regional Health Authority Contracts

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the minister raised the issue of enhanced services, because the majority of contracts for nonhospital surgical facilities in Edmonton and Calgary are up for renegotiation by the end of this month. Both the Premier and the minister of health have stated previously that the contracts should be fully disclosed. So my questions are for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the minister directing the regional health authorities to make public disclosure of the contracts one of the conditions of each new contract being renegotiated?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I know it's Thursday afternoon, but the chair did recognize one hon. member for a question and has proceeded to recognize another hon. member for a response, so let's listen.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I respect what you said earlier, but this refers to a particular need to reference the bill, and I think that if I could refer the hon. member to clause 12 of Bill 11, she would find that there is a transitional provision there with respect to contract renewals, which is there to address this eventuality.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, we're talking about current contracts in the absence of Bill 11, and there is a provision in the regulations for the minister to direct the policies of the regional health authorities. Will this minister require full public disclosure as a condition of the contracts that are under negotiation right now?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the legislation, Bill 11, requires disclosure of contracts.

Secondly, there is a provision in the bill that talks about the transition in terms of any contracts that come open within the next number of months, and that is provided for.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the question this minister is refusing to answer is the disclosure of those contracts that exist right now. Will he require public disclosure as a condition of the contracts that are under negotiation right now?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Minister of Health and Wellness does have the floor.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. leader is emphasizing that the need, of course, is to get on with it and pass Bill 11, because that would ensconce in legislation the proper provision, but in the legislation, which we do need to have – as I said, it is protective legislation in this particular respect – there is in section 12 the whole area of reporting on contracts, disclosing contracts.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we do recognize that with respect to the whole contracting matter there is a need for a transition, and there are certain dates referred to, I believe the end of October, whereby we want people who are entering into new contracts to adhere to the legislation and of course not make any changes contrary to the legislation until we have the bill fully implemented.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'll send over a copy of section 7 of the Regional Health Authorities Act for the hon. member.

Health System Accountability

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this government claims that Bill 11 will result in reduced waiting lists and reduced costs, yet the Minister of Health and Wellness hasn't presented Albertans with a shred of evidence to back up these claims or explained why after eight years under this government the system is in such a mess in the first place. This government won't even listen to the evidence given by the Auditor General, because it is so intent, of course, on subsidizing private hospitals with taxpayer dollars. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What does Bill 11 do to address the Auditor General's concern that this government isn't able to link new dollars going into health with patient outcomes in the system?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, as federal and provincial governments go in this country, I think that overall as a government we have introduced more measures and a better system of accountability all across our departments than any other place in Canada.

Secondly, with respect to the health care system we have a policy in terms of who is accountable for what within the health care system, which is a public document.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we have in our business plan and regional health authorities have in their business plans accountability and measurement provisions. Also, as I think is known to the Assembly, we are working on the establishment of a utilization commission which would be arm's length from the system and would look at the efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are being utilized.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, what have they been doing for eight years?

What does Bill 11 do to address the Auditor General's concern that this government lacks information on existing bed space in the hospitals?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are, both through the utilization commission initiative and through our own information gathering efforts in health, improving overall information systems across the health care system, and that is certainly an identified priority, one that has been identified already. The hon. leader, if she cared to, could see those efforts reflected in our overall business plan.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Auditor General has pointed out that occupancy rates for some of the regions in this province are as low as 22 percent, why doesn't the minister simply do what Albertans are asking; that is, open up the existing beds?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it should be very clear in the Assembly that Alberta Health and Wellness has accepted all of the recommendations in the Auditor General's report and is following up on them.

The other thing is that in terms of bed utilization certainly if there is capacity within a system where there is also the demand for services, regional health authorities would look at their own bed capacity, and if they were looking at considering a contract, they would consider first of all I would think whether they can effectively and efficiently offer the service themselves. But there is an option provided for in Bill 11 in terms of contracting.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. interim leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Private Health Services (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today federal NDP leader Alexa McDonough and I held a news conference in front of a billboard along Whyte Avenue in the beautiful Edmonton-Strathcona riding. The billboard, which advertises MRI scans, screams out "affordable" and "accessible," lifting these words from the Canada Health Act in its sales pitch. For \$499 per scan you can buy your way to the front of the line, ahead of the Albertans who may be more seriously ill or injured but cannot afford to pay. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why does Bill 11 fail to stop the blatant queue-jumping that takes place morning, noon, and night at private MRI clinics in Edmonton and Calgary?

2:10

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I recognize the importance to the hon. member of the occasion of the visit of the federal leader of the ND Party, and I welcome her to Alberta, but this is about the third time the question has been asked. The point is that the MRI scanning process is one that through an interpretation which involved the federal government some time ago was deemed to be an uninsured service. The rationale for it is that, as I've indicated in this House, the actual operating of the MRI device was a process which was handled by technicians, highly skilled ones, mind you, and was deemed to be a process outside the provisions of the Canada Health Act, and therefore you could have the private MRIs operate.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question, to the minister as well: if \$500 MRI scans are considered accessible and affordable, will \$5,000 gold-plated hip replacements in private, for-profit hospitals just ready to be legalized by Bill 11 also be considered accessible and affordable by this government?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member and the members of the Assembly that the Alberta government through Alberta Health and Wellness and Infrastructure is making major additions to the MRI capacity of this province. We have a new MRI going into the Red Deer region, into the Chinook region. I was just meeting this morning with the chair of the Mistahia region, and they are getting started with their plans there. There have been additional MRIs in Edmonton and Calgary added to the system, and there are plans for more. These are designed to offer public services, and they will be covered in terms of their costs for

the patients that use them within the public system for the insured services. We are recognizing that need and providing for it.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the minister. Are \$500 accessible and affordable MRI scans the way of the future in the Hips R U hospitals that will be legalized by Bill 11?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is quite clear in that there will be no private hospitals.

I would really like to add a point here since it would appear that we're doing something unusual in Bill 11, which certainly is not the case. Recently I was apprised that, for instance, in Manitoba, just another example, they have a contract with four private clinics, as I understand it. One of them is in downtown Winnipeg, and, Mr. Speaker, that contract has operated for some time. It provides for a wide range of surgical procedures. The quotes from that part of the country indicate that it is helping to relieve the pressures on their crowded public hospitals, and it has not been challenged by the federal government as being contrary to the Canada Health Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton Meadowlark.

Health Care System

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have many good friends and acquaintances who are medical doctors that I've discussed Bill 11 with. However, I'm hearing a different story when the AMA is talking privately to government and a different story when they are talking to the press. Recently the representative forum of the Alberta Medical Association passed a resolution indicating its opposition to Bill 11 in its current form and that it would like to see some amendments to the legislation. I understand that this morning the Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness met with officials from the AMA to discuss their concerns. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: could the minister advise what the nature and the outcome of the meetings this morning was?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, there were a number of matters discussed pertaining to the overall health care system in general. They concern the need for increasing the physician supply and the need to put more money into the system to expand the amount of services that could be offered. It concerned, as I indicated, the feelings that doctors have about their role in the system, as to whether they are regarded as key to the health care system as they should be.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we did go over five or six possible points of amendment with respect to Bill 11. I certainly indicated that we would consider their amendments. I indicated that there were two or three areas that we did not agree with but that we would look further at the ones that there seemed to be mutual agreement upon.

MR. HLADY: Well, Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental to the same minister: was the same message being delivered from the AMA outside after your meeting as it was inside the meeting?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I was not present at the press conference that followed between the members of the media and the AMA. Reports – and I don't think one should completely go by them – would indicate that the actual progress that we made, areas of understanding that we reached with respect to the legislation itself, although they did not in any way indicate that they were completely in agreement with it, were not featured in the response of the

president of the AMA. Rather, he was emphasizing the area that we didn't get anywhere because we didn't get more funding tied down, that sort of thing.

MR. HLADY: My final supplemental to the same minister: since the issue of physician supply has been one of the publicly stated concerns of the Alberta Medical Association, could the minister tell us what action is being taken to ensure that we have an adequate supply of doctors in this province in the years to come.

MR. JONSON: Well, as I've indicated previously, Mr. Speaker, we have – we can demonstrate, and we've reported on the fact – been working collaboratively with the Alberta Medical Association in terms of planning for increased physician capacity in this province. We have done a physician resource study that was publicized not too long ago in terms of its initial results. We have taken major measures to address the attraction of physicians to rural areas. We have established the rural physician action plan. We have increased the internships in this coming year that are provided through our two medical schools.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I think we have some good results in this province in that I believe it was 220 additional physicians practised in Alberta this year. They fell into two categories: the fact that we are retaining more of our graduates to practise in Alberta and, secondly, that we have attracted some from outside the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting to note that twice in this last week the minister of health has tabled the same legal opinion from Mr. Peter Lown with regard to supposed similarities between the Saskatchewan facilities act and Bill 11. Yet what's most interesting to note is that the minister has ignored the recommendations of a major report that Mr. Lown prepared when he was chair of the Bill 37 blue-ribbon panel. My questions are to the minister of health. Can he explain why he has ignored recommendation 5, which says that all surgical procedures exceeding 12 hours of completion, otherwise known as overnight surgical facilities in Bill 11, otherwise known as private hospitals, must be performed in a hospital? That was Mr. Peter Lown's recommendation to you, Mr. Minister.

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way of course ignores going on to the other part of the report which indicated that we should proceed ahead to providing legislation for the licensing and inclusion of private hospitals into the system. I assume that by raising this, she is supporting that, which Bill 11 of course does not advocate.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister, then, explain why he's ignored recommendation 6 in the blue-ribbon panel, which indicated that Bill 37, which was replaced by Bill 11, should actually have been replaced by amending the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Hospitals Act, and the Medical Professions Act? The recommendation was not to put forward stand-alone legislation again. Can you explain that please?

MR. JONSON: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker. On such an important topic it is better to have stand-alone legislation which is focused

upon the particular objectives that we have for Bill 11, our statement of adherence to the principles of the Canada Health Act, and I can go down the whole list of features of the bill.

We are addressing those issues raised in Mr. Lown's report. The point here, Mr. Speaker, is that we are consolidating it into one piece of legislation which is even more protective of the public system than what the blue-ribbon panel report contained.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister, then, explain why he again ignored the part of recommendation 5 which stated that approved surgical facilities which have overnight stays, private hospitals, Bill 11, should in fact meet the requirements of Alberta's Hospitals Act? That's why amendments to the Hospitals Act are required and not a stand-alone piece of legislation that does not have the same standard as hospitals require in this province. Can you explain that?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 has a number of provisos that go far beyond Bill 37 or the blue-ribbon panel report in terms of disclosure, in terms of contracting requirements, and of course it has definite reference to the need for the approval of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which is something that is also linked in with the current Hospitals Act.

Mr. Speaker, I find the question quite ironic or hypocritical or something. If we had brought in a piece of legislation that took a piece out of one piece of legislation and another and involved three acts, we would have been criticized for making it too complicated and not easy to follow. We've consolidated all of our changes into one very important piece of legislation, Bill 11.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Income Tax

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently there has been a lot of talk about Alberta's new personal income tax system. This new system was designed to cut taxes for all Albertans and to also make the provincial income tax system fair. Recent reports and analysis suggest that single middle-income Albertans will actually lose out under the new plan, that their taxes may actually increase, and that they would be better off under the current system. Today my questions are all to the Provincial Treasurer. With respect to single middle-income Albertans I'd like to know: will they really be worse off under the new single-rate tax system than they would have been under the old system?

MR. DAY: Well, a couple of points to make, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the federal plan, depending on which part of it you're looking at, is up to a four-year plan. So there's a presumption – and the jury is still out on this issue – whether the federal government as presently constituted will even be in place four years from now. That's a presumption. I know that certainly there are some, not the least of which would be the leader of the federal ND Party, who will be working hard to make sure that that isn't the reality four years from now.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, is: will the federal government stick to its commitment to pass these phased-in tax cuts along? The Alberta plan moves all of the savings into next year at a tremendous rate. We will be taking \$852 million less out of Albertans' pockets than we will this year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of changes the federal government has made for next year, we give them some small credit for follow-

ing our example. We were first out in terms of our tax plan, a very aggressive, exciting plan, and now with the federal government beginning to lower some taxes and that affecting certain laneways of taxation, the member's correct that if we do nothing, if we do not make any changes to our plan, even though all Albertans are going to be paying less next year – let me make that clear: all Albertans will be paying less – there are some who would be paying more if we hadn't changed the plan. That is a correct identification that the member has made.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you. My supplemental again, Mr. Speaker, is to the Treasurer. If our new system does not automatically pass on savings that the federal government handles with respect to their adjustments, are we prepared to do something about it?

MR. DAY: Yes, we certainly are, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's commitment, this government's commitment has been very clear on that. The federal reductions will flow through to the benefit of Albertans.

Now, the beauty of a simpler tax plan that everybody can understand is that you can adjust those levels fairly easily. We are introducing the plan. The starting point is an 11 percent rate on all incomes after they've taken all their refunds and after they've taken all their deductions, but we can move that rate downwards, we can also take those basic exemption levels and move them upwards, or we can do a combination of the two. So our commitment, as we look at our revenues at the first quarter, is to announce how we are going to do that and make sure that the full benefit of our plan and the full benefit of what the federal government has done will indeed flow through to all Albertans.

MR. MELCHIN: Well, I'm pleased, Mr. Speaker, to hear of his concern not only for just the province but for the federal system as well.

To the Treasurer: what policy recommendations would you make to give all those who would seek the leadership of the new federal Canadian Alliance?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'll address directly what is germane to the tax repercussions to the province. We will narrow and confine it to that, Mr. Speaker, to not cause you any angst on that particular item.

The very clear issue with our tax plan related to family income is both profound and exciting at the same time. We are able to and we have moved basic exemption levels up. Basic exemption levels have moved up 70 percent, and the spousal exemption is moving up to equal the basic exemption by 90 percent. That's going to do a number of things for all Alberta families. Those families and individuals will be able to earn more income before they are punished by the tax man for wanting to earn more income. So there are savings there.

For low-income families this is very important. Approximately 132,000 families in Alberta will not be paying any provincial income tax at all. That's tremendously relieving.

For those Albertans on minimum wage, those Albertans and their families will not be paying any income tax at all, and should that family configuration be a single-parent family, that single parent can take the full basic exemption up to \$11,620 and then take the spousal exemption, which is increased to \$11,620, and apply that to the first child thereby being tremendously relieving on a single-parent family.

The last quick comment, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta, with the Alberta plan, Alberta minimum-wage earners will pay no income tax, but they will still have to fork over \$640 to the federal tax man next year, and that's a disadvantage.

MR. SAPERS: What a load of united alternative that was, Mr. Speaker.

Private Health Service (continued)

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Health and Wellness tabled a legal opinion which compared Alberta's Bill 11 to Saskatchewan's Health Facilities Licensing Act. Now, he didn't point out that the difference between Saskatchewan and Alberta is that in Saskatchewan the government brought in legislation to clamp down on private clinics, not to build a framework for the creation of private hospitals. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Since this government likes to refer to Saskatchewan as an example, will the minister explain why that province maintains that MRIs are medically necessary required procedures and should be covered by medicare while this government in Alberta does not?

2:30

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I indicated prior to session yesterday in an interview that certainly we acknowledge that there was not provision in the legislation in Saskatchewan, as shown by the report by Dr. Lown, for overnight surgical clinics, and we also acknowledge the coverage with respect to MRIs. But I think you would find – and we would certainly need to verify this – that by far the majority of provinces in this country are following the same interpretation of MRI services and what is covered as Alberta is, and that is that it is and can be offered on a private basis without violating the Canada Health Act.

MR. SAPERS: Will the minister agree that the Saskatchewan Health Facilities Licensing Act, unlike Alberta's Bill 11, requires that any services normally provided in a hospital operate 100 percent, fully – that means entirely – within the public health care system?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, our approach, as is the case between Saskatchewan and Alberta, is the same, and that is that we will provide medically necessary insured services at no cost to the consumer or the potential patient and without any preference with respect to waiting lists within our publicly funded, publicly administered system, and that guarantee is the same in both pieces of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan does have private clinics. They developed this legislation to deal with them, and it is in terms of its principles in that regard very similar to what we are proposing to this Legislature.

MR. SAPERS: Given that Saskatchewan's law protects medicare and Alberta's Bill 11 would undermine it, will the minister confirm that Alberta's Bill 11 allows for surgeries requiring overnight stays in approved facilities – read: private hospitals – but Saskatchewan law specifically prohibits this from happening?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, our proposed legislation and Saskatchewan's legislation are the same in terms of the basic principles, and that is that both are designed to comply with the Canada Health Act. Both of them are designed to provide coverage of insured services. In fact, in our health care system in Alberta we cover, although it goes way beyond the provisions of the Canada Health Act, a much wider area of payment for services for Albertans than Saskatchewan is able to provide. There will not be preference given in terms of queue-jumping, and as I said, it will be publicly funded, publicly administered. They're very similar in terms of their principles and intent, and Mr. Lown's review says that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Fort McMurray Education Needs

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Northeastern Alberta is experiencing unprecedented growth due to oil sands development, and many Alberta cities are benefiting from the almost \$40 billion being spent in private-sector investment. My question today is, no, not to the Minister of Resource Development but to the Minister of Learning. The city of Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo are experiencing a superheated economy because of the billions being spent. Both the public and Catholic school boards are trying to cope with escalating costs in this superinflated economy. What can the minister do to help relieve the pressures being faced by these school boards?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In talking to the Fort McMurray school boards and talking to the Calgary school boards as well, it became extremely evident that we needed to add something to the funding formula, that we needed to add something to the growth and density component of this. As the hon. Member for Fort McMurray has said, there are rents up there that are 30 to 40 percent higher than anywhere in the province, and that's if you can get a place to rent. The kids up there still deserve an education. They still deserve funds for their education.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we did back in December of last year is start a committee called the growth and density committee, and that is led by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. What he is in the process of doing and will eventually give a report to me on is going around to these types of communities and talking to them and finding out exactly what kind of factor we should put in the funding formula for growth and density. We already have one for sparsity and distance, and many people would argue – and I think it's a very good argument – that equally there should be one for growth and density. I hope to have this report back within a month or so, and hopefully we can get something into the funding formula as early as September.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister: due to the distance, where Fort McMurray is located, and the sparsity, of course, in a superinflated economy, I have to ask the minister how he intends to work in attracting new teachers to this strong Alberta economy in light of the escalating costs in northeastern Alberta.

DR. OBERG: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question, because quite frankly in much the same way as downtown Toronto has a higher standard of living and a higher cost of living than downtown Edmonton does, Fort McMurray has a higher cost of living than downtown Edmonton does. So the Fort McMurray school boards have an incredibly difficult time in getting teachers to go up there. It's a very challenging time, but again we hope that by putting a growth and density factor into the formula, we'll be able to adjust that and give them the funding that will enable them to get the high-quality teachers up there.

Mr. Speaker, what's happening right now, quite frankly, is that the teachers that are up there are ones that are married to executives from Syncrude or executives from Suncor or people working at Suncor. That's a real problem when it comes to new teachers going up there. We're experiencing unprecedented growth in Fort McMurray, and we have to adjust to that.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you. My final question. We have lots of engineers in Fort McMurray, in fact 3,000 or 4,000, probably a few too many, but we really need some re-engineering of the funding formulas dealing with these special situations. My final question to the minister today: in light of the costs being 20 to 30 percent higher, in light of trying to attract new teachers, how do we go about in the short-term dealing with these tremendous pressures that are taking money out of the classroom just to deal with keeping schools open?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I'd already stated, I hope to have some changes to the funding formula by September.

Mr. Speaker, with your concurrence I'd like the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, as the person leading the committee, to supplement me on this answer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said that private hospitals would be more cost-effective. Everyone knows, however, the need for profit and massive administration in private hospitals means that they are less cost-effective. The Premier said that private hospitals were needed because they would be more efficient and alleviate suffering. That's not so. Finally, the Premier said that private hospitals reduce waiting lists. My first question is to the minister of health. Will the hon. minister finally admit that waiting lists for public health care will in fact get longer as trained doctors and nurses abandon the public system to practise in the Premier's parallel private system because of Bill 11?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has not contended that. The second thing is that Bill 11 is very explicit in stating very clearly that there will be no full-service, private hospitals in this province. That's prohibited in the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of evidence or reference points let's consider this particular example. In Manitoba they happen to have the Pan Am Sports Medicine Centre in Winnipeg, and there they provide for a wide range of surgeries. They recorded having done 1,418 surgeries last year, and they're provided block funding for these costs; that is, these surgeries for the public system. The Pan Am does everything from orthoscopic surgery on knees and shoulders to plastic surgery and cataract operations. There are also three other surgical facilities in Manitoba. The positive side to the Pan Am facility is that it takes the pressure off overburdened hospitals. "In an era of rapidly growing health-care costs, private clinics may be one solution to . . . ease the burden of medicare on taxpayers," says Mr. Hildahl, the commentator in Manitoba.

We could go on to talk about the Shouldice clinic. That's already been referenced in this Assembly. We could reflect upon, as I understand it, that at least one of the maritime provinces, which has, I believe, a Liberal government, is sending patients under contract arrangements down to the United States for surgical services.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would say that there is quite a bit of evidence around.

MR. MacDONALD: Very interesting, Mr. Speaker.

This is to the minister of health. Is the hon. minister saying now that the president of the Calgary Regional Medical Staff Association and the president of the Edmonton medical staff association are totally wrong?

Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, you're referring to two individuals who I'm sure over a period of a week may have said virtually anything and everything. It's totally incomprehensible to me how this question can be responded to unless you're a lot more specific about suggesting that somebody said a particular thing. Please proceed.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll try this then. This is also to the minister of health. Will the minister finally confirm that the real reason hundreds of public hospital beds and tens of operating rooms are closed is to artificially increase demand for private hospitals by creating a false illusion that the public health care system can't cope? Isn't that what this government's slashing of health care is all about, to cripple the public health care system so now we can have wealth care, not health care?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's quite clear – and for the member across the way I'd just like to say this one more time – that, first of all, there is no provision in this bill for private, full-service hospitals. Secondly, the proposed legislation does not force any regional health authority into having a contract with anybody. Further, there is a set of criteria in the legislation in terms of what requirements have to be met in terms of entering into any contract, and certainly the overall net benefit to the system of moving in this direction has to be paramount.

I would just like to conclude, but I could go on to some other examples here. Other places in this country have found it viable to contract with surgical facilities. That has not been challenged by the Liberal Party, as far as I know, in any part of this country, whether they're opposition or in some other role as government, Mr. Speaker, so that is the point that I'm making.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Kananaskis Development

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our unique treasures of natural heritage need preservation for Albertans now and generations to come, a constituent of Calgary-Fort, a well-known person among our communities, expressed to me his public objection to development in Kananaskis Country. My question is to the Minister of Environment. What is the government policy on Kananaskis Country?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I first of all want to say that I appreciated the letters that were tabled by the opposition Environment critic indicating a couple of people who copied her with letters indicating their feelings about Kananaskis Country. In response to those two letters that were tabled earlier today as well as to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, I'd like to say that the overriding principle in Kananaskis Country is the protection of the environment. This government will not, has not, and does not allow development that threatens this area's environmental integrity or its wilderness character.

Mr. Speaker, Kananaskis Country is governed as a multiple use area, and one of those uses is to provide recreational opportunities to Albertans and people who come from outside the province of Alberta, thousands and thousands of visitors every year. In May of

1999 after an extensive amount of public consultation the government announced that any new large-scale development proposals in Kananaskis would not be permitted. However, that decision exempted six proposals that were already under review. Of those six proposals I can advise members of the Assembly that one has been withdrawn by the proponent, and that was for a golf course in the area. The second one, one that was put forward, did not meet any financial criteria that were established. So of the original six that were grandfathered, four now are continuing through an extensive process of review.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you. My second question is to the same minister. What is the status of the proposal of an alpine resort development in the Spray Lakes area?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, December last I ordered the Genesis Land Development Corp., which is the proponent of the proposal referred to by the hon. member, to carry out an environmental impact assessment for their proposed four-season resort, but I also ordered that the impact assessment would have to include the downhill ski area that they were proposing at Tent Ridge and a proposed heli/cat skiing operation on Mount Sparrowhawk as well as a boat tour operation on Spray Lakes. From an environmental standpoint looking at the cumulative impact of all of these proposals makes the most sense with respect to the environmental integrity of Spray Valley. At this time government officials are preparing the final terms of reference for the impact assessment. This will act as an environmental checklist of all the concerns that Genesis must address in Spray Valley.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie tabled a letter that indicated that in looking at the development company's terms of reference, it did not take into account a number of issues. Those issues have been raised, however, by members of the public who have put forward their concerns. In all, Mr. Speaker, over 800 Albertans participated in submitting terms of reference. That is now in the process of being reviewed, and there will be a more comprehensive set of terms of reference established as a result.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Can the minister tell us what the process is for the no development views to be taken into account?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this is really similar to many of the concerns that people have already expressed. As I said in this House before, many people have expressed their opposition to any further development in the Kananaskis Country area, and as a result of that very good input by a number of people, I think that is what precipitated the policy we have, that I referred to earlier in my answer to the main question, a policy of no new large-scale development and a policy that environmental integrity and wilderness character are the most important principles governing how we will deal with Kananaskis country.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members in a few seconds from now we will call upon the first of three hon. members today to participate in Members' Statements, but prior to that, might we have unanimous consent to revert to introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly teachers and students from the Sexmith and La Glace junior high band. The band is located in both the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency and the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency. These are the forerunner of probably one of the most successful bands in this province. The junior high band has led to a senior band that has actually won recognition across all of Canada, across all of North America.

It's with a great deal of pride, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to introduce the bandleader, Mr. Paulson, teacher Mr. Scratch; parents and helpers Mrs. Van Dyk, Mrs. Hall, Mrs. Craibley, and Mrs. Hutchinson. The band was participating in the Alberta International Band Festival this morning and, I understand, performed very well. The group is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask the students, teachers, and parents attending to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

head: Members' Statements

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

Alberta Film Industry

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise this afternoon and announce some information about the Alberta Film Commission, which represented about a \$98 million industry in the year of 1998. It's an environmentally friendly industry. It's got diversified business opportunities for the province of Alberta.

With the provincial government's recent support by design and implementation of the Alberta film development program and its continued support with the Alberta Film Commission, this province is growing a film infrastructure for our province that is one of the many tangible and beneficial ways which our provincial economy is going to grow and move forward. As I said, it was a \$98 million industry in 1998, and that moved ahead by 50 percent in the first six months of 1999. This creates an economic multiplier estimated in various industry studies at 2.8 to nearly three times. The economic spin-offs include a multitude of business opportunities for our hotels, tourism, car rentals, catering industries, to speak of just a few. It brings an international focus to our province, and the film industry, as I said, is an environmentally friendly one.

Mr. Speaker, I was recently appointed a member of the Alberta Film Commission and serve on their board. The offices for the Alberta Film Commission are located in the constituency of Calgary-Currie. The mission statement of the Alberta Film Commission is: in the business to bring film production to the province, nurturing relationships with indigenous, national, and international producers, production executives, and production companies.

We're going to work together to strengthen our relationships with municipal representatives, union guilds, key members of Alberta business, and the public in order to nurture one-on-one relationships and to create a better understanding of this dynamic economic industry in our community. We have also got links with the Alberta Economic Development Authority, the Economic Development Authority of Edmonton, private-sector works, including financial institutions, and key leaders in our community who are taking this initiative very seriously.

I'm pleased to be able to act as a liaison for our colleagues, and I would like to share my information with them and look forward to hearing from anyone who has questions about the Alberta film industry or the commission. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Marriage Amendment Act

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 202 could soon be proclaimed into law in this province. I want to take this opportunity to return to it, because I believe the spirit of this bill is not pro marriage but pro intolerance and pro discrimination and anti human rights. Yesterday I made mention of the fact that I had questions about this bill that were never likely to be answered due to the speed at which this bill was fast-tracked to the Legislature. I'm sure that Albertans as well have questions but have scarcely had time to read the bill, never mind responding thoughtfully and clearly to its intent.

The government has forgotten the outrage that Albertans expressed two years ago when they found the threat of the use of the notwithstanding clause ensconced in Bill 26. The government may say to me, "That was then; this is now," and I would respond by paraphrasing Julie Lloyd of Equal=Alberta who said: you can't continue to load the gun and brandish a deadly weapon then, now, or ever; discrimination is discrimination.

To say that this bill is not anti gay but pro marriage cannot detract from the fact that this legislation legalizes discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It's an affront to Canadian values of decency and tolerance. It's an arrogant affront to the Canadian Human Rights Act. I quote the Canadian Human Rights Act, Mr. Speaker:

All individuals should have an opportunity . . . to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have . . . consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society.

I've always maintained that this bill is offensive to Albertans who see same-sex couples seeking equal opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to make. I despair that they do not have the support of their government in attempting to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Tourism Promotion Video

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday ITV News reported that the government has produced at taxpayer expense a new promotional video encouraging visitors from abroad to visit Alberta, but it would appear from the video that the current government only wants tourists to visit certain regions of the province, because the video they produced features nothing north of Red Deer.

Well, on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we agree that the Banff/Calgary corridor is certainly worth a visit, as are Lethbridge, Drumheller, and Waterton, but unlike the current government Alberta Liberal MLAs believe that Jasper, West Edmonton Mall, Vegreville, Lac La Biche, Fort McMurray, the Peace country, and the Reynolds museum are all worthy of promotion and are all part of the true Alberta experience.

For this government to earmark \$4 million for an international tourism promotion with public tax dollars collected from across the province and leave out two-thirds of the province is just plain wrong. Even the Alberta Chambers of Commerce have noted the government's failure to properly support and develop Alberta's fourth largest industry in a competent and equitable manner.

The repeated bungling by this government of tourism promotion for two-thirds of this province must end. The government's own commissioned studies show that Alberta's tourism industry has already lost international market share because of this government's incompetence and failed attempts at privatization through the now defunct Alberta Tourism Partnership. This government's latest insult to attractions and hospitality interests in central and northern Alberta is inexcusable. This latest snub of tourism in central and

northern Alberta is just one more indicator of how arrogant and detached this government has become.

On behalf of the two-thirds of the province left out in the latest tourism campaign we request that the government change its marketing plan so that all Albertans share in the promotion and the benefits from tourism.

Thank you.

3:00

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Standing Order 7(5) I would request that the information of what's happening next week we now share. Thanks.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm more than delighted to advise the House that next week will continue to be as productive as the last two weeks have been.

On Monday, March 20, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we will be proceeding with Bill 17, Fair Trading Amendment Act, 2000; Bill 10, Securities Amendment Act, 2000; Bill 13, Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2000; Bill 14, Alberta Treasury Branches Amendment Act, 2000; Bill 15, Business Corporations Amendment Act, 2000; and time permitting, Committee of the Whole, bills 17 and 2.

On Monday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply reporting designated supply subcommittees, two of five, Health and Wellness and Learning; reporting Justice and Attorney General and Municipal Affairs, main estimates; Committee of the Whole, if there's time permitting, in bills 1, 2, 4, and 5 and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, March 21, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply reporting main estimates of Innovation and Science; for second reading, time permitting, bills 20, 14, 15; and as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply reporting designated supply subcommittees, three of five, Human Resources and Employment, Children's Services, and Environment; reporting main estimates of Treasury, Infrastructure, Gaming, and Innovation and Science; thereafter in Committee of the Whole as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, March 22, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply day 1 of lottery fund and reporting of International and Intergovernmental Relations main estimates; thereafter as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, March 23, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply day 2 of lottery fund estimates and introduction of the Appropriation Act, main estimates, and as per the Order Paper.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there was one point of order provided to the chair today, but there is also a point of order arising out of business in the House yesterday, and I have this statement that I want to make.

Yesterday, March 15, the chair undertook to review *Hansard* and if necessary comment further on the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek which focused on statements made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning in question period about the chief executive officer of the Alberta Mental Health Board.

As the chair indicated yesterday, on pages 440 and 441 of *Hansard*, questions should be on policy matters, not on personality. All hon. members must be reminded that the protection they enjoy for anything said in this Chamber also requires members to act responsibly. To make allegations against someone who is unable to defend themselves can have serious repercussions for the individual and his or her reputation. This point has been made several times by this chair. The same point is found in *Beauchesne*, sixth edition, at paragraph 493(4).

The current practice in the Canadian House of Commons is reflected in a new book, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which the chair referred to on Tuesday. On page 524 it states:

Members are discouraged from referring by name to persons who are not Members of Parliament and who do not enjoy parliamentary immunity, except in extraordinary circumstances when the national interest calls for the naming of an individual. The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent, not only from outright slander but from any slur directly or indirectly implied, and has stressed that Members should avoid as much as possible mentioning by name people from outside the House who are unable to reply and defend themselves against innuendo.

The chair encourages members to reflect on these considerations before commenting on persons outside the House.

Now, I do believe that the Member for Edmonton-Manning would like to supplement my statements.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, I regret that the comments I made may have been heard as offensive. The intent of my questions was to determine the provincial Minister of Health and Wellness' policy re mental health issues. It was never my intention to violate the rules of this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under *Beauchesne* 409 and 23(j) of our Standing Orders with respect to the preamble in the question from Edmonton-Gold Bar this afternoon. In Edmonton-Gold Bar's preamble he first of all offended the rules entirely by exceeding "one carefully drawn sentence," by getting "an unfair share of time," by provoking "the same sort of reply," and in all the other areas of which you've admonished the House from time to time.

But the part about the preamble which was most offensive to the rules and the dignity of the House and the dignity of the members of the House was the fact that he chose to attempt to put words into the Premier's mouth by trying to characterize from his perspective what the Premier has been saying. What Bill 11 and this government have said is that we will be banning private hospitals in Alberta. The bill states that.

Now, they might dispute the definition of hospitals, they might dispute the definition of designated surgical facilities, but for the hon. member to come out in his preamble and attempt to tell the public of Alberta that the Premier supports private hospitals, when the bill that the government tabled clearly bans private hospitals, is wrong. It's characteristic of the type of misleading statements that have been utilized in preambles to questions, which can only provoke long answers, can only provoke members on this side of the House, members of Executive Council, in responding to the questions to spend an excessive amount of time trying to correct the misapprehensions that are being created by the preambles, and this is a classic example of that.

I would ask you to admonish the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on his specific question today and all members opposite to cut down their preambles, to use accurate descriptions when they table documents, to use accurate descriptions in their preambles, and not to encourage and provoke debate by mischaracterizing what is being said. In fact, it's not up to them to tell the people of Alberta what government members or cabinet ministers or the Premier has said. That is on the record, and this hon. member should not be twisting our words.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on this point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I've been asked by my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar to initiate the response to this point of order, and I have to say that I think the Government House Leader doth protest too much. First of all, the preamble – and I listened carefully to it – was perfectly in keeping with the House leaders' agreements that are in place regarding the structure of questions for question period. Secondly, for this Government House Leader to complain about anybody on the opposition side attempting to put words in the mouth of the government – well, first of all, that's ridiculous. Second of all, we don't have to. They can be condemned by their own words and their own actions. They don't need our help. Thirdly, of course, the Premier is the past master of putting words in the mouth of the opposition. In fact, I think what he has said is that people who oppose this government must be left-wing nuts. It's malicious misinformation, and whenever anybody disagrees with this government, he attempts to put words in their mouth. Obviously, I understand their sensitivity to this, but clearly it doesn't constitute a point of order. Maybe it constitutes a point of their own guilt.

Now, I understand that it's very hurtful to the government's position when their own words are reflected back to them, but there hasn't been one or two or three, there have been several times over this government's entire campaign to privatize health care in Alberta when they have said that they are in favour of private health care, that they are in favour of private hospitals, that they are in favour of private fund-raising for hospitals. So, Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar was speaking every word the truth. It was factual, it was to the point, and it was the Premier's own language. I suggest that that's the hurtful part. They just don't like hearing the truth.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: Well, the beauty of this system that we do have is we do have *Hansard* and we do have the Blues. That really allows for definition with respect to the issue.

As I understand the issue raised by the hon. Government House Leader, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar made a series of statements saying that somebody said this, and the point being made is that, no, that individual quoted did not say that. Here's what the Blues say. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar: "Thank you, Mr. Speaker." So far so good.

The Premier said private hospitals would be more cost-effective. Everyone knows, however, the need for profit and massive administration in private hospitals means they are less cost-effective. The Premier said private hospitals were needed because they would be more efficient and alleviate suffering. That's not so. Finally, the Premier said private hospitals reduce waiting lists. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the hon. minister finally admit that waiting lists for public health care will in fact get longer as trained doctors and nurses abandon the public system to practise in the Premier's parallel private system because of Bill 11?

Great danger when hon. members start saying what other people are suggesting or talking about. It clearly violates everything. If the hon. member would ask the question, "Did the Premier say this?" that would be appropriate, but to put words in somebody else's mouth certainly gets away from what we're doing.

Now, I've said this before time and time and time again about this personality thing. So I'm going to give all hon. members an example. I'm going to look at all hon. members, and I'm going to demand that you answer this question yes or no. I'm going to demand that you answer this question yes or no. I will let you know, however, that regardless of the way you answer the question, you will be found guilty. I would never allow this type of question to be in this Assembly, yet the skill of the utilization of the English language is such that I guess everyone would try.

So here's the imaginary test. I challenge you to answer this question either yes or no, knowing full well that there's no explanation allowed. I'm forcing you to answer this. You can't debate it; you can't think about it. You have to answer yes or no. Do you still beat your wife? You're guilty either way with that response, and we're going to be careful with the language we use in this Assembly to make sure we deal with policy and not with anything else.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. For the benefit of those people who are in the various galleries I would explain, as you can plainly see, that this is the less formal part of the Assembly called Committee of Supply. Members may move about, may even have coffee or juice with them, may remove their jackets and sit at various places. They must speak, though, standing in their place, and we have a convention that only one member standing speaks at a time. It allows for give and take back and forth between hon. members and the minister.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Infrastructure

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this afternoon's deliberations we'll call upon the hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like, just before I begin my remarks, to thank the staff of Infrastructure for all of their support over the past few months. I know that I would be extending on behalf of all of our members a sincere thank you for their excellent work.

Infrastructure's business plan and 2000-2001 estimates indicate how we in Infrastructure plan to contribute to Alberta's economic prosperity. We're going to do it by ensuring the provision of safe and effective transportation systems; by managing the development of seniors' lodges and learning, health care, and water management facilities; and by planning, operating, and maintaining government facilities.

The government's prudent fiscal planning and management allow us to continue directing funds to a number of different programs and initiatives throughout the province. Alberta Infrastructure continues to work with a number of ministries to address priority issues and ongoing initiatives and to increase our effectiveness and efficiency. Some of these initiatives include continuing to lead the cross-government Alberta capital planning initiative by working with other ministries on the development of a cross-government approach to

infrastructure planning, information management, and project prioritization. This will ensure the most cost-effective and efficient use of Infrastructure dollars.

We're working with Alberta Learning to plan and develop capital plans, programs, policies, and legislation for all learning facilities; with Alberta Health and Wellness to ensure that long-term regional capital plans are developed in partnership with regional health authorities by March 31, 2001; with Alberta Community Development on the provincewide upgrading of seniors' lodges; and with Alberta Environment on protecting the integrity and effectiveness of water management infrastructure.

We support the provincial government's ongoing theme of strong financial management. In order to position the ministry to address infrastructure funding and management matters, we continue to seek more functional and accountable ways to accomplish our mandate. Now, this is evident in the internal restructuring we did after the government reorganization last spring. We have reduced our full-time equivalent count by nearly 100, and we have also been able to reduce the administrative budget by approximately \$4 million.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

In the fiscal year 2000-2001 in direct response to the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure recommendations, several initiatives, including the north/south trade corridor, will receive accelerated funding. In fact, the task force recommendations have resulted in significant changes to the funding and management of highway systems. The changes will also have a major impact on the engineering and construction sectors in this province.

An additional \$900 million is required over a three-year period to address these recommendations. The Alberta government is providing most of this additional money through the '99-2000 supplementary estimates and in the 2000-2001 fiscal year for several initiatives. The Alberta cities transportation partnership program will receive a \$256.3 million investment. The cities of Calgary and Edmonton will receive funding based on the equivalent of 5 cents per litre of on-road fuel sold within each city. In fact, we just did a news release today on the signing of the agreement between the city of Calgary and Alberta Infrastructure. In total this represents an increase of \$30 million per year for each city.

3:20

Other cities will continue to receive basic funding of approximately \$60 per capita per year and will also be eligible for \$50 million in supplemental funding on a project-specific basis. Rural municipalities will benefit from a \$160 million investment and the new resource roads program introduced last April, and that will receive \$34 million. Under the streets improvement program towns and villages will receive \$60 million. This program has now been expanded to include hamlets.

In our ongoing commitment to develop the north/south trade corridor, \$130 million will be invested in rural portions of the corridor, \$10 million in upgrades to Calgary's Deerfoot, \$15 million in Edmonton's southwest ring road, for a total of \$155 million. This continues the government's commitment to accelerate funding of the north/south trade corridor until four-laning is substantially completed in the year 2007.

Now, primary highway construction will receive \$147 million. The province will begin assuming responsibility for the construction, maintenance, and rehab of secondary highways as of April 1, 2000. The 2000-2001 estimates show an increase of \$70 million from '99-2000, to \$160 million, to cover the cost of all maintenance and construction for secondary highways. This results in significant

savings to municipalities as they will no longer have to fund maintenance or their previous 25 percent share of secondary highway construction projects. As a point of interest, over the next three years the \$900 million in transportation infrastructure funding resulting from the Premier's task force recommendation will create up to 13,500 person-years of work for Albertans.

Now, there are some other aspects of this year's estimates I would like to highlight. Pressure on other municipal infrastructure, such as waste and water treatment facilities, continues to be recognized in the 2000-2001 estimates with increased program funding of \$29 million, which is \$10 million more than last year. Compared to the '99-2000 budget, spending on health facilities has increased by \$53 million, to \$168 million, to address health infrastructure upgrading needs.

School funding allocations include \$160 million for preservation and high-priority expansion to accommodate increased enrollments. Part of this allocation includes \$40 million in block funding to school boards for minor preservation needs, \$40 million for new facilities, \$10 million for innovation funding, and \$70 million for preservation and modernization.

The 2000-2001 estimate for postsecondary institutions is \$47.4 million. This funding provides institutions with the flexibility to address present and future renovations and replacement needs as well as program expansions.

Seniors' lodges will be provided with \$17.1 million to be used for the upgrading of 15 lodges and the start of designs for 12 additional lodges.

In 2000-2001 we have an ongoing commitment of \$95.6 million for the operation and maintenance of government-owned facilities. Approximately \$76 million has been allocated to the leasing and operation of private-sector facilities for government program use. We're also targeting revenues of \$100 million from the sale of surplus properties over the next three years. It is expected that up to \$35 million in property sales will be achieved this year. The 2000-2001 estimates reflect the use of this revenue.

Now, some of our ministry's other major initiatives, Mr. Chairman, are in transportation safety services. In consultation with stakeholders we continue to focus on generating a stronger awareness of the role Albertans play in traffic safety. Work on the regulations under the Traffic Safety Act will be completed. We'll continue with extensive public consultation as these regulations are developed. In 2000-2001 consultations will include discussions on graduated licensing, commercial vehicle equipment standards, and off-highway vehicles. We'll also be developing regulations in consultation with the railway industry and user groups prior to the proclamation of the Railway Act. The objective of this new act and regulations of course is to provide for the safe operation of railways under provincial jurisdiction.

In collaboration with school facilities stakeholder groups many of the recommendations of the School Facilities Task Force will be implemented this year in order to fulfill the government's commitment to improve capital funding practices.

Now, using teams of private-sector consultants, we have completed phase 1 of a complete facility audit of all schools in Alberta. Phase 1 completed 433 of 1,460 schools. We looked at the structural, mechanical, electrical, and building envelope, and when this audit is finished in the summer of 2000, we will have a condition inventory of all Alberta schools. We'll also be bringing forward a funding strategy to address the backlog of modernization and upgrading while addressing the requirement for new student spaces in the form of new schools.

We're recognizing that we need to continue being innovative and forward looking. Using a value-based focus, we're planning to look

at new technologies and to review the ministry's processes as they affect our stakeholders and partners. We're reviewing roles and responsibilities in our relationship with these stakeholders, specifically with our consulting and contracting partners.

Alberta Infrastructure is committed to the economic prosperity and development of the province and Albertans, keeping up with the rapidly changing world around us. We continue to face many challenges as a result of economic and population growth pressures and the problems presented, of course, by an aging infrastructure. I believe the estimates for this year indicate that we have a renewed focus on infrastructure in this province. With the collaborative efforts of ministry staff, our partners, and our stakeholders we are addressing these challenges with creative and effective solutions that'll lead us successfully through the 21st century.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Now, certainly I'll be happy to answer any questions that may arise this afternoon. I'll try to answer them all, and those that I can't, I will respond to the members asking those questions as quickly as possible.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to focus on one part of the department's budget, and that of course is the money for new school construction. One of the fears with the creation of the department was that it would be divorced from the education needs of youngsters. I don't think it's been in operation long enough for any kind of a judgment to be made about that. One of the good things about moving school buildings to the Department of Infrastructure is that there is an opportunity to focus on communities and to look at the total infrastructure of a community, not just the school buildings in isolation. I hope it will be to the advantage of communities in this province when things settle down.

In the Speech from the Throne one of the sections was titled The Government Plan – Caring and Strong Communities. It's a theme that's carried throughout the throne speech, the notion that we all want to work for strong communities in this province, yet one of the regulations, one of this government's policies that is very, very destructive of communities is the utilization formula, the formula that's used to determine whether or not a school district or a community can build new schools. From one end of the province to the other the utilization formula, which has been used as an instrument to control school building costs, is tearing communities apart. Whether they be rural communities like Fairview and the Whitelaw school in the Peace River district or whether it be in the city of Calgary, it's having a very destructive impact on those communities. I think that if the Department of Infrastructure does nothing else this year, addressing that problem and sorting out the kinds of difficulties that it's imposing on citizens, it would have done a wonderful job.

3:30

I had a communication from parents in Calgary who are and have been for a number of years arguing that they need new schools, and they make a number of arguments in their request that their school board's plan for building \$61 million worth of new schools next year be supported. One of the points that they make is that schools in urban areas, like rural areas, neighbourhood schools in particular, have a great deal to do with the strength of neighbourhoods. When you bus youngsters across a city, the opportunity for a neighbourhood to build some identity, to keep track of youngsters within that community is very, very much lessened and weakened. That is the

place that Calgarians find themselves. Like Edmonton they have excess school space in a doughnut ring around the centre of the city and a very critical need for new space in the outlying areas.

One of the arguments they make is that school is more than a building, bricks and mortar, that it's an integral part of a community and community-building. When you apply the utilization rate to those cities, you dismiss all of those concerns. It becomes a formula that is very dictatorial and has nothing to do with the needs of a particular community.

The saddest part of the use of the formula is that it pits community against community, neighbour against neighbour. Certainly that cannot help in any way achieve the government's stated aims of building strong and caring communities. The utilization formula forces school boards to say, "Our utilization rate isn't at 85 percent," or whatever the magic number is at the moment, "and to get to 85 percent, we have to close a school in an older neighbourhood that has some vacant space if we want to build or open in a new area." So you have neighbours at each other's throats. "These neighbours who have a school that's half empty, why should they have a school? Here we are a new neighbourhood and we have enough children to fill two buildings and we don't have a school within walking distance." So the battles go back and forth.

The same thing in rural Alberta. You have schools in small communities, and it literally means the death of the community if that school dies. In the southern part of the province I've talked to school boards, and they admit that the enrollments are low, but again the impact of that building on the community is such that moves to close those small units are very, very destructive. I think the department has to come up with another way of looking at the problem, that it's much more comprehensive than what the utilization formula does.

The parents in Calgary made the point that there are many disadvantages of living in an urban area, but one of the advantages is having young children within walking distance of the school from their homes. As soon as you start busing children across the city, they lose that kind of intimacy that they value. I know that the argument's made: well, rural Albertans bus their children. But there's another set of values that rural Albertans have that many of them deem more important than having a neighbourhood school. Proximity of young children to their parents and to their homes is destroyed under the present application of the utilization formula.

The minister in his remarks mentioned the School Facilities Task Force in January 1998. That's two years old now. A couple of the recommendations in that report talked about looking at schools within a community context: the opportunity to have public health centres, youth drop-in centres, seniors' centres; that school buildings could be used for much more than housing a school program for a few hours in the day; that that would make a tremendous difference to their communities.

To their credit a number of years ago the government had a community school program. That was a program where schools could hire a community school co-ordinator who actively encouraged community groups to come into the school and use that facility. In their wisdom they discontinued that program, and I think it was an unwise decision, because everyone agreed that the community school program was successful. Why it was discontinued I'm still not sure I understand. I heard the argument that every school should be a community school, but that really doesn't wash.

Ontario's last royal commission report, *For the Love of Learning*, went even further than we did in Alberta and asked that there be a community co-ordinator appointed for each school and that that co-ordinator be charged with making sure that the school space was used by attracting into the building services for children like health

and social assistance and really making those schools the heart of the community, that they can be.

The Calgary parents went on to make a number of other points. One of them is that there are no studies in terms of the costs. What does it cost to bus youngsters for 10 or 15 or 20 years out of a neighbourhood to a school in the inner city? It may be an operational cost that can be borne in a budget a year at a time. But over the long term, what are those costs? Do we have information showing that it would be wiser to bus for 20 years than to build a building?

One of the other questions that the utilization formula raises is: how long should a building be expected to pay for itself? How many thousands of graduates have to go through a building before it can be deemed to have done the task for which it was originally built? The whole notion of that utilization formula and the kinds of implications it has for community, for children, and for their school programs is one that I think really needs to be looked at very, very hard.

The Calgary public situation is classic. They have indicated that they need \$61 million for new schools next year, and I think the minister said that his total budget was \$40 million for new school construction. That's just Calgary. The same situation, as I said, prevails in Edmonton and in other parts of the province.

The parents end their note with the statement that Calgary children and the communities have been in the past number of years acting in good faith and trying to make things work, and now they feel they are justified in having the problem addressed and that the core of that problem is the utilization formula.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd conclude. I know that the minister has made a number of comments about the audit that's under way. I'm not sure that the minister knows that of all the resources the province provides to school boards, the only resource they monitor to the extent that they do is buildings. They never go to a school board and say: look; you've got 3,000 teachers; show us that every one of those 3,000 teachers is working the five and a half or required number of hours each day. They don't monitor the activity of every teacher, but it seems that with buildings somehow or other a different mentality takes over, and that is that every inch of space should be counted.

I used to regret the amount of time I used to spend as a school trustee worrying about school buildings and where they were going to be built and where they weren't going to be built and how much better off youngsters in this province might be if all of that energy could be directed towards their programs and trying to make our schools better places academically and intellectually.

I really, really would urge and plead with the minister to take that utilization formula and replace it with something that makes sense, something that doesn't disrupt our communities and doesn't set citizen against citizen, because it does none of us a good service.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

3:40

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you. I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for recognizing the fact that there is real merit in concentrating all of infrastructure in one department. In fact, without a doubt the education ministry at that time had to not only concentrate on programming but also had to find dollars within the same budget for facilities. Now we will be able to focus directly on infrastructure in this department, on a good infrastructure management system, and the Minister of Learning will be responsible for the programming.

With respect to the comments on the focus of communities: exactly correct. We're trying to be as innovative as possible and to bring not only the municipality to the table but also the regional health authority, any of the seniors' groups, recreation authorities, and the school board. I know for a fact that because all of the responsibility is vested in one Ministry of Infrastructure, we have already on occasion heard from different groups from the same area coming to talk to me, but they have forgotten to talk to their neighbour, which could be the school board or the regional health authority. So this gives us an excellent opportunity to send them right back to the community and say: maybe you should talk to the mayor about your plans. It has worked to the advantage where now the stakeholders are back at the table sharing their plans of what they would like to do in the future. I know it will result in much better planned facilities.

I may be repeating myself, but I am very proud of the fact that in my own hometown of Andrew we have a multi-use facility, that was put together in the very late '80s, which includes not only the municipal town office but also the school. The library now is not only the school library, but it's also the public library. You can bring in volunteers in the evening. We have a good recreation facility attached to that. Not only do students use it, but so do members of the community, including seniors. There's one good example of that.

The hon. member was talking about the utilization formula. We definitely have accepted one of the 41 recommendations of the School Facilities Task Force to revisit that formula. At the present time there is a subcommittee of the School Facilities Task Force. The very distinguished Mr. George Nicholson is a member of that committee, and I know that he has many years of experience not only as a former educator/principal but also as a board member, presently serving as chair of the Edmonton public. We have ASBA and CASS represented. There's another group on the committee plus Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Learning. I think we'll give them a little time. We said that we'd like to get the report back as soon as we can, hopefully early this spring but certainly June, so that we can start implementing some of their recommendations.

They will have a challenge, because they're going to have to find a balance between rural and urban school systems. They are different. I agree: when you're talking about closing a school in a community, many times it does take much of the life out of that community. We have to find that balance, then, as to when the public, the parents of those students, look at programming in terms of what programs are offered in the school or what is better for the student in terms of maybe a better program delivered a few miles down the road. They are very difficult questions to answer. As a former school trustee we went through some of those, and they're not very easy debates.

Now, I've met with members of the Calgary board of education. I've also met with many of the MLAs. We're encouraged by the renewed focus of the Calgary board of education to tackle this issue of underutilized schools, and I think that in conjunction with the lead project in Calgary plus the fact that the utilization subcommittee is meeting, we should have some good direction coming from that committee and see how we can settle the differences.

Underutilized schools in downtown Calgary, for instance. We're hearing a number of things: that property is valuable but it's also recognized as part of a green area, that there may be some historical significance to some of the schools. So there are things being played here other than just looking at a building and saying: well, you know, it's underutilized; it should vanish. I think this is the time for the municipality and maybe the private sector to step up to the plate and say: this building may be modified for another use; it might have

some students, but part of that building may be used for another purpose.

I'm encouraged by the kind of dialogue we've had lately with the separate school system and the public school system and also encouraged by municipalities looking at their planning schedule and looking where they need recreation facilities and the realization: you know, perhaps we should share a mechanical room; we don't necessarily have to do our own thing; we can share. We certainly have the technology today to meter the water and the power in all of these facilities and attach the costs of those utilities to the user.

In Calgary, as well, we are working on a project where we have hired a former school superintendent to work with the municipality and also the private sector and to come forward with a few recommendations over and above what will be coming from the utilization committee. So I think we'll have a vast amount of information to then bring forward to this Assembly.

On the issue of buildings. A comment was made about the time we spent monitoring buildings. Perhaps in your opinion, hon. member, you may feel that we spend too much time monitoring buildings. On the other hand, there's huge room for improvement. School boards have used their own criteria to evaluate the condition of their buildings, using a whole myriad of consultants. This particular audit now will have very specific criteria applied to all buildings. We'll have the most extensive audit of school facilities, which will now allow us to plan further into the future in terms of, you know, the age of the school, what the condition is of much of the mechanical of the building envelope, and try and anticipate when dollars would have to go into that school and at what point. The preliminary estimates, of course, are not that inconsistent with the School Facilities Task Force, but once we complete all the schools, we will have a much better picture. That audit should be complete – you know, I'm anticipating this summer, but it should be in our hands by September. Then we will work with the ASBA and the ASTA to try and work out a plan.

I know from traveling to many of the schools in the short time that I've been in this ministry that there is room for improvement. There's room for improvement on our side as the infrastructure management. There's also room for improvement on behalf of the school boards, as well, for maintaining the buildings. One of the questions we'll be asking is: how do we get the best value for the taxpayer's dollar in terms of the building preservation? I know that there are some that have come to me and said: you know, there is room for improvement, and we want to work with you to try and find a way of ensuring, in terms of building quality restoration, some of the other preservation, and even the new construction, that what dollars we get go to the best use.

So I'm greatly encouraged by the support and the comments of Edmonton-Mill Woods and will review the *Hansard* to make sure that I haven't missed something in your earlier comments.

Thank you.

3:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to start off with some questions on this education item in Infrastructure just to try to bring out some other answers. It's interesting now, the blend of different programs that Infrastructure has in it. I know I'm going to probably be duplicating Learning questions and Municipal Affairs questions and whatever. But what I didn't hear from you, Mr. Minister, you not necessarily knowing because of not living in a big city, is if you believe that inner-city schools are very important to the connection. What I mean by that is that you can take a map –

and I've gone to two different lectures on what is called “no new schools.” I even brought the chairman of the Catholic school board, whom I'll introduce today, to my Rotary Club. The whole title was: no new schools in Edmonton since 1994.

If you take a map of Edmonton and you take the geography of it, I do not have a school north of 153rd Avenue in my end of town. That means that children are traveling. You have parents that have a \$300,000, \$400,000 house on a lake site in one of my better areas, and they're being bused down to what are considered inner-city schools. That is a major, major phone call that I get through my door, and I don't blame them one iota, because there's an 80 percent turnover in those two schools that they're being bused to, and where the parents . . .

DR. WEST: You get hundreds of phone calls from those \$300,000 houses.

MR. GIBBONS: If the hon. minister over there would ever like to have a talk on it, I'd like to talk to him and educate him about what happens in the city.

Talking about the geographical rings of the city, the inner-city schools are really meant for kids that do not necessarily have parents that even wake up with them in the morning to walk them two blocks to school. These children do not have parents or even any sibling that can get them there. But if they had to get out and ride an ETS bus to that school, chances are that they probably would never go to school. I look at the facts. If you take a look at the rings and you go to inner-city schools: keep them open wherever you can as a walk-to school. You get into the next area, and maybe the utilization of downtown might be 65 percent. The next area, the next ring out, might be a 70 percent utilization. You get out one more ring, and then you have the 100 percent utilization.

I'm looking at a hundred percent utilization; it just isn't cutting the mustard anymore. We have to build some schools. We look at the Minister of Justice's area. I do know that they've been trying hard to make the two school boards come together, but infrastructurewise they're not, and it's a major, major concern.

Getting on to the rest of the Infrastructure questions and what I was really going to relate to. Today our communities face a number of serious challenges, and we need leadership in this province so Alberta can move towards solutions in partnering with Alberta municipalities, whether they're urban or rural. There has been a complete lack of leadership. Today what I found on my desk just when I went back was the municipal 2000 program, which is a good program. I wasn't surprised at any of the communities that actually are noted in that municipal release, because each one of the issues I'm quite familiar with. A complete lack of leadership is absent in this province, and we'll not reach anywhere near our full potential until we do build partnerships with our local governments.

This government has been talking about a three-year plan in last year's budget but have actually only been handing out one-year dollars. I kind of wonder whether or not the minister or any other members here could operate one of their businesses, if they still have it, not knowing if any constant dollars are coming to them. AUMA and AAMDC were very happy to hear the three-year talk last year, but they also realized that a five-year is actually a better business plan, so I hope we do work toward that principle of five years and also some substantial funding. Stable funding is the major, major item that we should be asking for.

Instead of pointing our finger and fighting with another level of government – and this is the east against the west – the province needs to engage Albertans in a search for a new solution. As a province it is time to acknowledge our local governments as full,

mature partners in building Alberta. The old view of municipalities as being the children of the province is totally out of touch with today's reality.

These are the challenges. How do we go forward? In my view, we need a new partnership between the province and the local governments based upon respect, fairness, and farsighted views of our future. To accomplish this, Mr. Minister – and that is actually related to both you and the Minister of Municipal Affairs – develop a comprehensive provincial/municipal agreement or charter that sets out each player's role, responsibility, and resources. Find the means of providing municipalities with primary access to the property tax base and other long-term, stable, progressive sources of revenue.

This is why a bill is coming forward – and I will have to monitor what I say on it – called the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act. Typically, because it's coming from our side and because it's the Leader of the Opposition's bill, it won't go very far. But I'm marketing that out there, and if nothing else, I hope the ministers will take it and build it into a future plan, a future bill, a future concept. Finding means so that our local municipalities can actually look and plan for the future instead of looking at the carrot wagging in front of their nose: that seems to have gone out with the old farmer attitude with their sons and so on.

The next one is to create an environment in which municipalities are totally accountable to their taxpayers for all sources of revenue and expenses to meet their core responsibility and engage in a long-range plan. That might take one or two years, but I believe that, with the size of this government, in building toward planning with each municipality you only have to do it once every few years, sitting down and actually playing a little bit of tough love but actually working out plans so these municipalities can actually plan, and patting them on the back when they are doing a good job, because throughout this province they are.

The government needs to move forward as a leader in developing a framework to design and treat local governments equally, to improve lines of accountability, to respect local autonomy in decision-making, to increase co-operation, and most importantly to provide, as I mentioned before, stable and predictable funding to local governments. The time for planning properly – and I've said this a number of times to a lot of people. It's no different than if your business is working well, and when the province is doing as well as they are now, I would suggest that it is time now to plan properly. It's the same old item. In the 1997 election it was quite easy to point out that there was no plan by this government, and from my end of town people really bought into that. You could have taken it at that particular time and really built a plan.

Some of the concerns that I've heard throughout the province – and these are just highlights of the typical meeting I go to. The number one concern is downloading. The second one is being treated like a child of the province. Lack of respect is the third item, from the government MLAs who come from a local government background. Fourth, which is actually probably moving right up after number one now, is infrastructure concerns, and where are they going to be planning? Education tax: well, if we keep tinkering for the next few years, we might come up with the right tinker.

Secondary roads were mentioned before. When they got dumped back out there a few years ago, everybody had to recoup and figure out how they were going to do it all of a sudden. Now, I do know you took the pressures, and this is your reaction to the pressures that were actually there. For those that did do a good job out there, I hope you are going out and letting them be part of the tendering factor, and hopefully they can be part of the overall managing of the roads that they know so much better.

4:00

I look at how you contract highway 1 and I look at grading. When you don't grade down the side of a ditch, then the wind starts blowing and you've got all that snow coming over top, so it just lands on the other side. That's the same type of thing: if the local person knows how to grade the road. It's no different than the ridiculous job the city of Edmonton does in the land given to them in northeast Edmonton by the province in the early '80s. The city of Edmonton absolutely do not have a clue how to grade a road outside of grading something inside the city. That's the major complaint I have in my own constituency, the rural side of it anyway.

Loss of tax base to the towns; that is, losing the grain elevators. I continually talk out in the rural area – you know, there was this pointing of fingers out there before when the elevators' tax base went to the town and not to the municipality. Now it's the opposite way around. I hope you teach co-operation and working together.

Seniors' housing: insufficient; backlogs; talking about mega-centres. My brain thinks of saving dollars all the time; I believe in 62 units versus the 20 units. Hopefully we move very slowly as we strip our small towns of these different things, different seniors' lodgings and so on, because it's one of the last of the threads that are actually holding them together.

Community housing. What department is in charge? Well, we know that it has been put over into the community now, but it's still under Infrastructure. In your department, Mr. Minister, I do hope that we are looking at the homeless throughout the province. This is a case where I do know we were part of a study conducted under Minister Bradshaw of the federal government. I was happy when finally there was some communication that happened a number of months later, but it's not far enough. I hope we do build a partnership between the province and the federal government and that this doesn't get lost.

I guess under Infrastructure fall a lot of different things. By pushing amalgamations in certain areas, it might work; it might not work. We look throughout the province, where we've got the Edmonton capital region. We have the MD of Mackenzie and the problems we had up there last year. We have Lacombe, Rainbow Lake, Fort Vermilion, the MD of Peace River, a combination of Nampa, Peace River, and Grimshaw. I hope we handled that one to everybody's liking.

I'll move along to talking about other items. When faced with pressures of growth, can cities like Calgary and other municipalities across the province continue to rely on a system of provincial grants that have been proven to be unstable and uncertain? We need to build more consistently, more stably, more looking into the future. Hopefully, once we get past the next election, when we quit buying the next vote, we can actually maybe sit down and look at that. Is there a better funding approach that would allow our municipalities to meet their roles and responsibilities more responsibly? That's why I am very proud that our Leader of the Official Opposition, my leader, is actually carrying a bill forward that I am very passionate about, and when you give up a spot to a leader, that means a lot on this side.

We believe the time has come to seriously consider revenue sharing, and this bill hopefully will enlighten some people, because provinces like Manitoba have gone to a system playing with this. I didn't totally take to their system, but I did read it, and I kind of feel there's a bit of this happening around the Vancouver area, around the amalgamation of the larger centres, a kind of sharing, looking at how they can use the revenue sharing. Tying the transfer to specific sources of revenue such as personal income tax could reduce the fiscal vulnerability arising from uncertainty over the future grant

levels, particularly in the onetime grant program in Infrastructure. Revenue sharing would also give local governments access to sources of revenue that have grown in proportion with the economy.

We had a question from the Member for Fort McMurray today about growth, and we can see that in other areas. Tremendous growth like that really goes back to your department, of how you plan your schools, how you help them cope with that. I do know Edmonton can complain about the education tax. In the next couple of years they're going to see the same kind of growth that other areas have been witnessing, and I hope by that time we have a plan for that.

The Official Opposition believes that the revenue sharing will improve financial planning capabilities for municipalities, giving them enhanced ability to meet their priorities in accordance with their roles and responsibilities.

I can actually go on and talk about a lot of things, but I do believe that I did ask questions and I did get partial answers, not a lot of answers, when I asked questions around the fuel tax. I do know that we were asking questions a year ago at this time, and there was no real answer from your department, Mr. Minister, but then it went ahead. You know, the politicians in Calgary at the civic level were very passionate about this, and I do believe that it's a step.

The biggest complaint I have in and around Edmonton is that one minute you talk capital region, the next minute you talk co-operation, alliance, whatever, but the whole area didn't benefit from the fuel tax in that. So I do hope there are some plans being placed. I do know that I appreciate the capital investment study that was put on, that I FOIPed last year and questioned, and I surprised the Premier of the province that there was such a study. But this is the way we move forward. We keep planning, we keep investigating, and hopefully this particular government will take some of these suggestions out of the capital investment plan.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I'm going to sit down and listen to the minister's answers or wait for his answers – it doesn't have to come right now – and let some other members speak.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

MR. STELMACH: Considering that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning would like to have some answers, I'll take this opportunity. He began by talking about schools and how important schools are, and I think I've covered most of that in my comments earlier to Edmonton-Mill Woods. However, when we start talking about parents and who takes care of the children, I will say that that's out of my responsibility. Maybe bring those questions to either Human Resources or to the Minister of Learning. If what I hear is true, then we would have to look at what kind of transportation system is in the city of Edmonton to transport students from their homes over to the school.

You also put on the table the very same question we've been asking. The development plans were put in place years ahead, and the people buying those expensive homes or building those expensive homes know full well where those students are going to be going to school. Now, we're trying to take the pressure off by at least looking at K to 3, a starter school, being as close as possible to the community, but for junior high and high school they may have to travel farther because of the intensity of the program. I believe that over the next few months we'll find some balance on that.

I just wanted to make one comment with the busing. There are many school districts in the province of Alberta and certainly in this country of Canada where the students are busing two hours one way to school. That's in rural Alberta, but you know, it's a fact of life.

So people do make that choice as to where they decide to live, and I know we won't be able to provide the infrastructure for a 20-minute walk to school in all cases.

4:10

It's very interesting, because when I was in Calgary, there was also a difference of opinion. It seems some parents would like to see their child step on the bus right in front of their house and know that they'll be safe going right to the school. The school board takes over the responsibility right as soon as that student gets onto the bus and has that responsibility until they step off the bus in front of their own house. Again, I think the only thing we're looking at is the time spent on the bus, but just because they ride the bus is not necessarily wrong. Some parents actually take great comfort in the fact that their children are safe as soon as they leave the house.

I believe the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning commended us, because he said that there's an absence of complete lack of leadership. So there must be considerable leadership there, because you can't have an absence of complete lack of leadership. Maybe it's just a play on words, but let me give examples of some of the leadership.

In terms of stable funding, I recall in this House, when the business plans were first brought forward, the issue of three-year rollout. Well, there was some disagreement especially from members on the other side, because, boy, that's sure a new policy, and how can you predict some of the changes in the growth of the economy? How are municipalities going to predict, et cetera? Well, you're right. I can give you one very quick example of how quickly the growth is occurring in the province. In the city of Calgary they were predicting one and a half million people by the year 2020. Now, at this rate of growth and if it continues, there will be a million people by 2007. So that's how quickly we have to adapt in Infrastructure to provide and ensure that there are dollars available to cover some of the infrastructure needs.

With respect to the comments made on the role of municipalities and revenue sharing, I'll leave that to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, but at the end of the day there's only one taxpayer. There's only one taxpayer, so we have to ensure, for every dollar that's invested in whatever program, that we get the most value for it. We believe that municipalities are making good decisions with respect to the funding they receive, and that's why they're getting the kind of cash injections that they are. I mean, we're front-ending three years of dollars for the municipalities, so I think we have great confidence in their abilities. It will enable them to do a thorough plan, to review and decide what these dollars will go into: LRT, some of the improvements to the various road projects within the municipalities. In addition, the fact that we are going to be taking over the Deerfoot and the ring road around Edmonton enhances their financial position as well, because we'll be assuming full responsibility.

With respect to secondaries, yes, in the beginning of the early '90s we had to find ways of maintaining the kind of road infrastructure that was necessary to move goods and services. Municipalities at that time agreed to cost share 25 percent for the maintenance and the preservation of those roads. Now, in saying that we dumped that responsibility on them and then took it back and we're leaving the municipalities, it's interesting to note that some municipalities did not want to give up their secondaries. They actually wanted to pay the 25 percent.

So the bottom line here is that it's very difficult to satisfy every municipality in terms of the kind of policy, but the reason we're looking at assuming the responsibility for secondaries is much greater than the relationship with municipalities. It's to have a provincial highway network system that is consistently maintained and also consistently regulated so we don't have a mixture of road

bans across this province, because the truck traffic will increase. I've used this comment before, but I'll use it again: if someone is leaving the city of Edmonton with a load of pipe and they get on 831 – just one road I'm very familiar with, at Lamont – their road ban could be 90 percent. They get into Smoky Lake and it could be 85 percent. Thorhild could be a different level, and so could the county of Athabasca. This way it'll be monitored and it will be consistent.

Grain elevators. There has been a large growth of high-output grain elevators throughout the province. Many of these were built on sites where neither the municipality nor the provincial government had any idea they would be placed. Some of them, quite frankly, are placed on secondary roads or primary highways. However, many are not, and we have to also monitor now the kinds of traffic flows that will be going to those elevators.

Now, the closure of the small elevators. We cannot hope to remain competitive, more in a global marketplace, moving raw product to market and looking at including small elevators where in a day they might load three cars when on a good day in a high throughput elevator in an eight-hour period they'd load 100, 102, and some are loading as many as 116 cars. So in terms of the kind of infrastructure commitment made by the private-sector grain companies, I commend them for that, because they're certainly stretching their neck out. Where the system falls apart is that we can't get the railcar to port and back, because that's where the highest cost, the most inefficiency occurs in any system, compared to those countries that we compete against for the market.

There's no reason why, when you load cars in Alberta, it takes as many as 21 days to get them back. It's another very good example of where the federal government has deregulated the Crow rate – and at one time, I'd like to remind everyone here, there was \$8 billion on the table, and a couple of the provinces, not Alberta, couldn't agree on who should receive the payment, the railway or the producer. As a result, when that money was on the table as \$8 billion, there was a change in the federal government, and all of a sudden they came up with a paltry payment of \$1.6 billion: here; take it.

Now, even further to that – I can even go on – the federal government has rewarded those very same provinces that were sitting and not coming to an agreement by a further payment in compensation for the Crow rate and forgetting Alberta again. I really don't know how that particular policy is going to lead to greater efficiency, but I do know for a fact that we will be miles ahead – pardon the pun – of the other provinces in terms of the road infrastructure, and we will be able to move those goods to market.

Where we're going to have to create change is to ensure that the responsibility of the Canadian Wheat Board goes to the port. Their main responsibility is to sell the product, to create the sale and then put out a tender for the quantity of grain they have sold to the grain companies. Then those grain companies will put pressure on the railway companies to get that grain to port and loaded on a ship.

I don't know how many members in this Legislature realize that in the country of Canada today 82 percent of the ships that come to load grain load at multiple berths. Do you know of any other country where that happens? No. This is year 2000. We have computers, we've got all kinds of information equipment, but nobody wants to change the status quo, and at the end of the day it's the farmer that pays the cost. He has no way of influencing efficiency and no way of pointing fingers at those individuals, whether it be grain companies, the railway, or the Canadian Wheat Board, that are not accountable and efficient.

4:20

So that's where we are in the province of Alberta in terms of grain transportation, and that's why the north/south trade corridor is so important. Now we will be peeling apart that kernel of wheat. We'll be taking out the wheat gluten, the bran, the flour, and also the

ethanol, and that will be going south, because those countries that are waiting for or want to buy the grain can't afford to pay the price that we need to sustain the farm, and the traditional marketplaces, like China, now have a surplus of wheat, so why would we be sending them more wheat? If we did send them the wheat germ or the wheat gluten, I'm quite sure they could add that high-protein product to their low-protein wheat and create a better product. Plus you're shipping a high-value product at less tonnage, so you're getting more dollars for it.

Currently the policy doesn't support that, and we're looking for some leadership from the federal government and from the Canadian Wheat Board, because our position is very clear and it's on the table. I hope that we do resolve it, because there isn't enough money in the Treasury, not in Alberta's Treasury and certainly not in the federal government Treasury, to compensate farmers every year for the kind of violation of efficiencies that we could reach in this country.

Now, there was a comment made with respect to Infrastructure and working with the federal government. We'll be glad to work with them. The main thing is that our position is that it's got to be hard infrastructure. It's got to be either roads or what's under those roads, and that's sewers and water lines. No more Zambonis. That's got to be very clear.

Further to that, we will be watching the negotiations very carefully, because this first hundred million dollars is supposed to go to planning. We know where we need the roads and where we need infrastructure. We don't have to spend a hundred million to do the planning; we can put that hundred million directly into the ground. But watch very carefully. What might be coming out of Ottawa is taking the \$2.65 billion less the hundred million for planning and block funding every province instead of doing it on a population base. With 10 percent of the population, our fair share out of that should be \$265 million. We will wait till 2006, when this plan actually does take effect, to see how much of that \$2.65 billion will actually come to Alberta.

With respect to the increased commitment of dollars for roads, those roads are very important to move goods and services. Those goods and services that we transport and convey on roads create wealth, and we tax that wealth to pay for social programs like health and education. So you've got to get your product to market. If you don't get it to market, you don't create a sale. If you don't create a sale, you don't create any wealth. I would hope that the Assembly agrees that the investment in road infrastructure is very important and will lead to further growth in the wealth of this province.

Questions on fuel tax. Well, we collect about \$550 million in the province. It all goes back into road infrastructure. We've actually just about doubled what's going into road infrastructure. Our position is that if we're taxing fuel, you're burning that fuel on the road and that money should go back into roads, because you don't wear out a road idling your car in the garage. You've got to use a road; okay?

Now, with respect to the fuel tax, we send roughly \$600 million to Ottawa. It'll be more this year because of the 7 percent GST. We won't talk about that particular program, but there's a considerable difference in the GST paid on 40 cents a litre fuel than on 68 cents. It would be interesting how much of that new growth in revenue is going to go into some sort of an infrastructure plan but should go directly into highways. What we're hearing now from the federal government – and it's not to point fingers. I had a very good working relationship with the federal minister of agriculture when I was in the ministry of agriculture, and I'm quite sure we'll have a good working relationship here. Except that if it's fuel tax, it should be going to roads. If you're not going to put it into roads, I suggest: just don't tax it. Give us that room, or just don't tax it. That in itself will create more room for the consumer to invest in whatever goods

and services they want, which will again lead to further growth in the economy.

I believe I've answered most, but once again we'll review the *Hansard*, and if there's anything that I've missed from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, we'll certainly get back to him.

The 5 cents a litre equivalency to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. I think it's an example of a visionary plan, of thinking out of the box in terms of taking some of the fuel tax that we collect in this province. Yes, there is risk. There's risk to those two cities, and they have certainly recognized that. On the other hand, we've also recognized the risk on our side. I think it will now lead to better co-operation between the cities of Edmonton and Calgary and the government, and I'm looking for really positive things to happen.

I know that in Edmonton and in Calgary and in every corner of this province over the next three years you're going to be passing construction sites on every corner. In fact, we're going to see more construction in this province than ever before; as I mentioned before, 13,500 man-hours of work. We're now going to benefit because of the stability in the funding from other contractors in other provinces looking to move their equipment to the province of Alberta because they now have an opportunity to tender on some of the projects that'll be ongoing. As a result, that in itself will lead to lower tender prices, which again will convert into more projects in the province of Alberta.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Chairman. Well, interesting discussion so far. A couple of things I want to make note of, and I have some questions for the minister. I'll preface my comments by saying that I've always appreciated this minister's candour and willingness to answer questions, and I think he has distinguished himself from some of his colleagues, in fact, except when it comes to the federal government, in which case there seems to be a consistent theme on the government front bench.

You know, we look at the last comments about the fuel tax, for example, and how much is going to Ottawa and how much is going into the roads and the advice to the federal government about what they ought to do with that revenue. I'm looking at the minister's consolidated income statement, and I don't see any revenue line item that says: here's the dedicated revenue from the provincial fuel tax collected that's going into infrastructure or roads. In fact, the truth is that it's a policy decision of the government. They collect it all, it goes into general revenue, and then cabinet gets together and decides where the money is going to be spent.

Now, I'm not going to diminish the commitment that this government has made to road paving. In fact, some would say that some governments in the past in this province have made a big political deal out of road paving and have made promises about how many roads they're going to pave and build and construct. But I do think it's kind of disingenuous to say, "Well, the feds ought to dedicate all this revenue to one thing, and we're going to make sure that they do," when in fact we don't see that advice being taken here.

While I'm looking at the minister's consolidated income statement, I'd also like to make reference to the line item that is calling for over 13 and a half million dollars' worth of revenue coming from premiums, fees, and licences. I would appreciate the minister's commentary on what impact the review of premiums, fees, and licences will have on these projections and whether or not he's satisfied that he has cost-of-service data. It's on the consolidated income statement under revenue. It's a stand-alone line item. It's on page 182, Mr. Minister, of the Alberta budget book and business plans. It's the consolidated statement. I can find you the reference

in your budget plan if you want, but it's pretty straightforward. It's \$13,588,000 as projected income from premiums, fees, and licences.

4:30

My questions are: have you done the analysis, and in looking at the province's own reviews, are you satisfied that you have supportable cost-of-service data on every one of those premiums, fees, and licences so that we know, particularly when it comes to the fees and premiums that are extracted from Albertans when it comes to sliding scales, there is a relationship between the cost and the fee or the licence or the premium? It seems to me that's still a pretty high watermark. Just for information, before Eurig, before the analysis, before we were officially concerned that there has to be a relationship between the cost of the service and the fee, last year's comparable forecast was \$14.4 million. So it's come down about \$900,000, and I guess the more specific question now is: is that because of decreased activity, or is it because of a rollback in fees, or is it a combination of the two? Is the rollback related to the cost-of-service issue?

The minister also made some reference to when the three-year business plans were first rolled out – I guess it would have been back in '93 – and was suggesting that he remembers the opposition saying: oh, well, that's kind of dangerous, and how can you forecast? I'm paraphrasing, but I think his point was that there was criticism coming from the opposition about three-year business plans. I'm not sure that I heard that same criticism. I mean, what I remember hearing about three-year business plans was a demand from the Official Opposition. In fact, a big part of the 1993 general election campaign, from both the Conservative and the Liberal parties, had to do with accountability and value for money spent. I seem to recall not only a demand for value-for-money auditing but also for careful business planning and projecting.

In fact, if there were any criticisms that I recall coming from the Official Opposition when it came to the three-year business plans, it was that they didn't go far enough, that we didn't have good performance measures, that we didn't have good criteria for the business plans, that we didn't have appropriate approval measures, that we didn't have targets and goals set to expenditure levels. More recently of course, Mr. Minister, as you know because you've heard me say it in this House so many times, the Official Opposition is now calling on the government to roll out 10-year forecasts when it comes to budgeting issues. So we're certainly not critical of the three-year business plans per se. What we're critical of is their presentation and how they're being used or not used by the government as real planning tools.

Now, along those lines I'd like to focus my questions on the minister's business plan as presented to the Chamber. Let me say another nice thing, because sometimes we get criticized for only complaining. I happen to be probably one of the few Albertans that have read this particular budget plan book cover to cover. I did that for many reasons, but one of the major reasons why I did that is that I'm always curious to see whether or not there is agreement across all the government departments in the presentation of the performance measures and the goals in the business plans. There isn't. In fact, some departments – and it doesn't matter which ones they are now, because I referred to them specifically in their own estimates – are abysmally poor when it comes to presenting particularly the performance measures, the accountability structures in their business plan.

That is not the case with Infrastructure. In fact, your performance measures are well presented. They are for the most part clear measures, although I have some quibbles with some that I'll get to in a minute. They appropriately give us both a little bit of history

and project into the future across the business planning cycle, which is what they're supposed to do. So I want to thank the minister – I think it's consistent with his character of being as forthright as he can – for having performance measures in his business plan presented in this way. It makes it easy to read and to understand and then to appropriately query or provide some suggestions where they could be improved.

When I look at goal 1, improving transportation safety, there is no traffic safety measure yet, and I'll give the minister the benefit of the doubt in terms of developing this new measure. Over the course of the year, though, what I would ask the minister to do as this measure is being developed is to share with the Assembly, perhaps through correspondence or tablings in the House, what the trial balloons are. I don't mean that in any kind of a negative way. You know, as you're developing that measure, it would be very interesting to see the evidence and the thinking as it progresses, who you're testing it out against, what other measures from other jurisdictions are being considered.

Now, the mechanical safety of commercial vehicles measure is also kind of interesting. "This measure is defined as the percentage of commercial vehicles that are rendered out-of-service." It's based on roadside checks. If I take a look at this, at first blush it is a remarkably stable measure. Between 1998 and the end of the planning period, by the end of fiscal year 2003, there will have been hardly any measurable variation in the results or the target when it comes to either the percentage of vehicles rendered out-of-service requiring minor adjustments or the percentage out-of-service requiring mechanics' attention.

The difficulty I have with this measure is that I have no idea whether it's a good or a bad thing. Is 25 percent of vehicles inspected and taken out of service a good or a bad thing? How does it compare to other jurisdictions? What it means is that 25 percent of vehicles require minor repairs when they're inspected and 5 percent require mechanical service. That's nearly fully a third of commercial vehicles that in some measure aren't safe on the streets and the highways of Alberta. I guess I would just feel better if the measure was comparative against other jurisdictions and gave us some sense of whether or not this was an acceptable level of faulty commercial vehicles. It's one thing to say that the target is consistent, but is that okay? I guess I would argue that having nearly a third of commercial vehicles unsafe on the roads in Alberta is not okay, and I would be very anxious to hear the minister's remarks as to what he proposes should be done about it, unless the minister is going to make the argument that it's an acceptable level.

The next performance measure under goal 2 has to do with the integrated infrastructure planning. The performance measure is "progress on the collection of facility condition information." What it says is that the ministry will collect condition information on all ministry-owned buildings over 1,000 square metres. Well, okay. The target for 2000-2001 is that 89 percent of data will be collected. The target last year was 77 percent. I don't know how close we came to achieving it, because it doesn't tell us, but the target for 2001-2002 is 100 percent. So I'm assuming that there is a backlog or that this is a new process and that there is an inventory of buildings and a roster and a list. I'm just curious. You know, we went from 60 percent in '98-99 to 77 percent, so we managed to audit 17 percent of buildings, and then we're going to go up by 12 percent in 2000-2001. Well, we can do 17 percent, apparently, between '98 and '99-2000. Why couldn't we do the same, 17 percent, again? How was the 89 percent target arrived at? I guess that's the essential question.

4:40

Now, the performance measure under goal 3, which is to "work with partners to provide quality infrastructure," has to do with

"progress on completion of major water management construction project." I am aware that some of these, like the St. Mary dam spillway replacement, will be completed over the next fiscal year, but one that I wanted to ask about is the South Heart River dam project. I see that the completion rate is 50 percent for this fiscal year and another 50 percent for the subsequent fiscal year. I may be wrong, but I thought that was a three-year construction project. So please correct my understanding. I thought when that was announced, it was announced as a three-year initiative, but we only have, apparently, construction goals over two years. I'd appreciate some comment on that.

The next one has to do with seniors' lodges, and there has already been some discussion on seniors' lodges. Now, the performance measure has to do with all 121 seniors' lodges, and it's "seniors' lodge upgrading projects completed." The target is another one of these targets that I guess is okay as far as it goes, but the concern I have is that I don't believe it actually gives a very worthwhile measure. I'll explain to you what I mean. The business plan target for 2000-2001 calls for 90 of the upgrading projects – 90 out of the 120, I'm assuming – to have been completed. Well, that's fine, but wouldn't a more reasonable measure be: what percentage of lodges have been upgraded to meet a set of independent standards?

In other words, will a lodge get a check mark as being a completed upgrading project if it gets a new roof but also needed a new kitchen and also needed new electrical services and also needed new flooring in the common areas? I mean, is the upgrading project simply seen as achieved and a mission accomplished when it's upgraded on one of the deficiencies? My understanding is that the seniors' lodges across the province have a laundry list as long as the floor in this room of the things that they need. Given that priorities have to be managed, not all of their deficiencies are going to be addressed at the same time, but this performance measure doesn't capture any of that. It would lead a casual observer to conclude that because it got a check mark as a completed project, all of the issues in that lodge have been taken care of.

The next performance measure that I want to talk about is one under goal 4, "improve the management of provincial transportation infrastructure." In particular, I want to look at the highway pavement condition. Now, this is a measure that apparently will be "an indicator of riding comfort for the traveling public on highways under provincial jurisdiction," and it uses a measure referred to as the IRI, the international roughness index. First of all, I'd like to know whether or not they've set the standards for the IRI in the springtime in northern Alberta. I have a feeling that if they did, with the potholes it would blow their scale right off the meter. I'm talking about the IRI and whether or not they take the measure in the springtime.

The measure also makes note that "by sustaining pavement quality through regular rehabilitation, the total life cycle cost of the highway system will be reduced." Now, the minister got into a little bit of hot water with the press, I think, by making some comments about how highway pavement life could be extended. I don't want to go back there, but I am a little curious about this particular measure. The national highway system average under the IRI measure for highways is described here as a numerical expression, and then it says: other highways' average IRI. Now, when I take a look at this and I compare it to the table that explains the chart, what it says is that if you have a roughness rating of 1.50 to 1.89 on a national highway, it's only "fair." If you take a look at all of the ratings from '98 through to 2000-2003, they're all in the "fair" category. Now, the other highways' average IRI says that if you have a rating of between 1.5 and 2.69, you're also just fair. All of the other highways are also in that just fair portion. So what this tells me, again, is that we don't really have a measure that tells us about targets for

planning for the future. What it tells me is that we're satisfied that our highway system in this province, according to this international measure, will just be fair.

In fact, there's been very little movement. Unfortunately, the only movement that there appears to be is downward movement on the IRI scale. It doesn't look as though there's been any tremendous improvement, in other words, when it comes to the riding comfort. Again, this is a measure that gives us a picture of what exists, but it doesn't give us any value around that reality. Are we comfortable, no pun intended, with this level on the IRI scale, or should we be doing more about it to improve the conditions of our highways?

Now, the other question that I have has to do with the lack of performance measures under goal 7, which is to "create a value-added organization." The performance measure is a client satisfaction measure. What it says is:

This measure is under development. Data will be collected and reported once a consolidated strategy for measuring client satisfaction is developed.

Well, I guess my concern here, Mr. Minister, is that this is where I would have thought you would have started. With a goal that says that we're going to "create a value-added organization," it seems to me that that's exactly where you would start and that's how you would sort of decide what it is the rest of your business plan is going to look like.

While I was willing certainly to give you the benefit of the doubt on these other new areas, these new initiatives that require performance measures, I'm a little more reluctant to provide that same benefit when it comes to this area. I would like to encourage you quickly to develop an array of performance measures so that we can gain a better picture of what is meant in your department when it comes to creating a value-added organization.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I'm aware of the great interest of my colleagues in getting an opportunity to get up and ask questions, and I thank the minister for his willingness to allow a tag team to happen here and for him to respond to the two inquiries at the same time.

There are really just three categories that I want to talk about here today. The first one. I'm reminded of the Premier talking about Alberta as a house and the mortgage and all of that kind of stuff. What keeps coming back to me is that as any homeowner knows, you have ongoing maintenance costs, and you have to take care of those ongoing maintenance costs on a regular basis. In some cases for the big-ticket items you've got to save money or put money aside or plan for it in some way, so it's a planning function and it's a saving function.

I've been looking through my Auditor General's report for the exact reference. I'm sorry that I haven't been able to find it, but I know that the Auditor General had pointed out that we have to be able to have a reasonable planning process and a reasonable injection of money or money available to follow that planning process to maintain the infrastructure in the province. To sort of cut everything back and perhaps even not put money in for a year or two costs us eventually and may in fact cost us more than if we had done the regular, ongoing maintenance. In many cases we know that these buildings exist, we know the highways exist, and we know there has to be maintenance going into it. There's no surprise here. So I have questions about management and planning skills and getting enough money to actually look after the maintenance requirements.

4:50

I'm going to talk specifically about the schools in Edmonton-Centre. Now, those are classed as inner-city schools, and there are a couple of issues going on there. One is around this utilization formula. I think that with one exception all of my schools are very old schools. They're definitely older than 35 years old. These are great old three-storey brick or stone buildings, much larger than we would ever build today. I have to say: at what point do you stop adding these into this utilization formula? I think it's creating an inequity and not through their fault. Yet when we look at the utilization formula, there is always a call for: well, let's get rid of the inner-city schools.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

When we look at other important things in Alberta like communities, like quality of life – and certainly we in Edmonton learned that lesson very well when everyone shrugged and said: it doesn't matter if nobody goes downtown; who cares? We did find out that it matters very much if people go downtown, because it cost a lot of business, affected the vandalism rate, crime, all kinds of things. So eventually we learned that you want a vital downtown with people in it, with people living there, people moving about in their daily lives, not just this place that vacates at 4:30 and the sidewalks get rolled up.

I do question including older schools in the utilization formula. A specific question for the minister. There used to be a regulation or a proviso or something that said that if the school was more than 35 years old, then it wouldn't be included in the utilization formula. I'm wondering if that is still in place. I suspect that it's not in place, and I would like to know if the minister would consider reinstating that.

As well, I think we have to be careful that in the rush to economize in the short term, we don't take away possibilities and flexibilities that in fact have a big payoff for us in the long term. A couple of examples of that. I know that the school boards were being pressured to sell off some of the school buildings they had where the schools weren't being used anymore, where they'd stopped running classrooms in the schools. The Edmonton school board, to give them credit, had been pretty adamant in hanging onto those schools and finding other things to do with them. In the long term we ended up with places like the Bennett environmental centre, which is a great asset to schoolchildren and educational endeavours all across the province, and McKay Avenue school, with the city of Edmonton school board archives in it. The Edmonton school board was exactly right to have resisted the pressure from the government to sell off those buildings.

Another example is Victoria school. You know, it was an inner-city school. Enrollment was declining, with pressure to dump the school, sell it off, get rid of it. The school board was able to maintain it partly by locating the Centre for Education, the head office essentially, next door to it and committing to keeping that school viable. Well, look what happened. Because it was available and there was commitment to it, we ended up with the special fine arts school operating out of that high school, and now in fact it is K to 12. It's become a very vital part of that community and has revitalized the area around it and, because of the uniqueness of the program, draws students from all across the city and in some cases, I think, the province.

Those are sort of the two points I wanted to raise about the infrastructure and planning and maintenance.

The last thing. A couple of these old schools in my constituency have acquired, through diligence, very hard work, creativity, and

even ingenuity on behalf of the staff, the money to do the much-needed renovations. But we still have schools in which – I mean, I am shocked at the state that some of these schools are in. Victoria school is an example. I was there for an event I think it was in the fall, about six months ago, and as I left the school, I was looking at the side of the building. Great big hunks of concrete or plaster or whatever it was made of were just falling off the building. I wondered to myself: isn't this a safety problem? I'm sure it is. I've heard other stories about windows coming out, falling out of the building, happily, rather than falling in on the class.

I really look to the minister to be able to plan in a way that has regular, ongoing maintenance for our schools and not to let them get to the point where we either have to abandon them because they're in such crappy shape or where they could be causing some harm to the students. The point is that it's about good planning. It's about constant maintenance. Maybe that's drilled into my head because I'm the daughter of a man who was involved in the trades for so much of his life and his insistence that you treat your car and the equipment you work with properly, that you always maintain it on a regular schedule, not just when you think it might need it. Maybe that's why I think that way about this, but I think it's important.

Now, I'm going to go on to something else, and that's seniors. One of the issues that I am really concerned about in my constituency is around West Edmonton Seniors and what has happened with their location in the General hospital. This is an organization that provides invaluable service in my constituency and in fact beyond the constituency. It gets seniors out of their homes, gets them out into a different location and active. They have all kinds of classes, physical classes. I cohost a Christmas celebration with them, and we have tap-dancing displays and clogging and ballroom dancing. The activity level is tremendous. Those seniors are in far better shape than I am. This is a good thing. This is preventative health care. This is saving us money, a lot of it. They also offer nutrition, and they have guest speakers in. They have an outreach program.

Now, they do get some funding through Alberta Health for the outreach program but nothing for the rest of it. They're trying to raise the money to keep themselves going here. They started out in 1998 paying about \$341 for their rent, plus housekeeping charges and the telephone, that sort of thing. Then it went up to just over a thousand bucks in 1999. As of the first of January, because of the negotiations and the changes in the Capital regional health authority being responsible for the General hospital site, these guys are now being asked to pay 4,200 and some odd dollars a month. Where are they supposed to come up with that money? They don't get any assistance from the government. As many times as I sweet-talked the Minister of Community Development, I cannot get him to agree to put funding in for seniors' centres.

You know, the idea of a user fee that could come up with that kind of money every month is simply beyond the means of the seniors that live in that area and the seniors that use that facility. So I'm asking the minister to please, please work immediately on resolving this situation. As I understand it, I think it's because the Capital regional health authority is needing to make income from the space that they are responsible for there. If it's possible for the minister to be perhaps taking back responsibility for the section of the building that West Edmonton Seniors is in and being able to work out a more reasonable rent, that is the kind of partnership and leadership that I'm looking for from this government.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

We're already into this year. West Edmonton Seniors has been on the hook for a long time. It's been writing to the government for a

long time. I shouldn't have to get up here and hassle you guys about this, but I am. The ball is in your court now. I'm going to look to you for a very fast resolution of this. [interjection] Well, you know, it shouldn't have to happen, but it's happening.

The second thing is an encouragement to the minister to look for those partnership opportunities in other government-owned public works, supply, and services locations. You guys have got a lot of empty space out there. I would encourage the minister to be looking for opportunities to partner with groups in the community, seniors' associations, but even perhaps youth groups. You're having to keep the lights on and the power and the heat in these buildings anyway. Look for those partnerships that would really be benefiting the community. It's not going to cost you cash out of pocket. It means you don't have to be giving a grant perhaps of so much money to the groups, or they can use their grant money to actually provide the programs instead of scrounging for their rent money.

5:00

That's the kind of leadership I know this minister is capable of. I know he can do this. I believe he is capable and has the leadership skills to do this. If there are staff in the gallery, fun-seekers all joining us, they're good staff. They can help the minister do this. Thank you.

Now, a couple more things. [interjections] I know that my colleague for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has lots of things she wants to say, so I will give way to her, despite the fact that I have many more questions that I could raise with the minister.

As always, I will complain about this budget process which limits us to a very little bit of time to talk about huge departments, which are now superministries in many cases, such as the Ministry of Infrastructure. Well, I may give him the title of superminister if he can resolve our problem with West Edmonton Seniors and other seniors' lodges. Until then, there is not enough time to debate these budgets. This is not serving Albertans well where we have to be rushing through things and cutting off questions and cutting off issues. [interjection] No, she's going to get up.

Thank you, very much, Mr. Minister. I look forward to your written responses to my questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would move the committee rise and report progress on the estimates of Infrastructure and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Infrastructure for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001. They report progress thereon and request leave to sit again.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 5:04 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]