

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 6, 2002** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 02/03/06
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: We'll call the committee to order.

Bill 8 **Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2002**

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: You're ready for the question, I guess.
 On the clauses of the bill are you agreed?

MR. STEVENS: There is one speaker on 8, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The chair hasn't seen anyone rise to speak.

MR. STEVENS: If you have the patience of Solomon, you will have the ability to see someone rise.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The rule of the Assembly is that members will only be recognized in their own position, where they're supposed to sit, and the chair now sees the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie wanting to speak. The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It was my understanding that we were going to finish up in committee on Bill 2 this evening, and that was the small misunderstanding that occurred, but we're quite happy to finish up on supplementary supply in committee at this point in time.

This is my first opportunity to speak to these supplementary estimates, Mr. Chairman, so I do have a few comments to make in terms of the dollars that have been requested at this particular time. The good news about this particular supplementary estimate is that it's a very small amount. In fact, it's probably the smallest request that I've seen for supplementary estimates since I have been in this Legislature. However, we have to remember that it is the second time that this government has come back for supplementary estimates, and that was quite a bit more money at that time. We're looking at \$15.513 million, all of which goes towards operating expenses and capital investment, and I do have a couple of questions about this.

I'll just start at Children's Services perhaps. We have seen an increasing number of concerns and problems with Children's Services here over the course of the past year, and now the government is coming back and asking for \$500,000 "to provide funding to address the additional needs of children receiving services under the Child Welfare Act that arise from a labour dispute in the education system." This labour dispute, Mr. Chairman, is just indicative of the ongoing problems that we have seen in Children's Services. We continually in our offices get concerns about the way things are being managed in Children's Services. They don't seem to have adequate resources to investigate or to provide support to the families and to the workers. The workers are just absolutely overburdened with work at this particular time.

Through the newspapers we have seen some horrendous cases that have occurred just this last little while, two small girls dying in transit to a new residence, why they were let go when there had been some problems with their health and with their care, why they were put in the care of a person who wasn't used to raising small children at that particular point in time – it was the children's grandfather – to be transported over a couple of provinces with a two year old, which, I would have to say, would be an onerous task for anybody without support or help, be they male or female, old or young, something that I would seriously question if I had someone I knew who was planning to do that. Yet these professional workers gave the okay for that to happen.

We have more recent cases in the news. We have the young man who was taken into custody, put in a hotel room without supervision, who partied hard all night with his friends, not the least of which were a number of also underage girls, where there was lots of liquor and lots of other inappropriate activities happening. We have to question why this is happening and how it is that the Minister of Children's Services doesn't know that these things are going on. It's a horrendous state for this particular department to be in. So the questions that really come up for us are: what are the additional needs specifically, not only in this request but in this department?

There is a point when you do cutbacks in a department where you just completely become unmanageable and inefficient. I would say that this is probably the case in this department, and that is a very big shame. Who's at risk more than anybody else are young people who are already at risk and parents who need support and assistance and training. That's what I have to say about that particular dollar value.

In Environment we see just over \$8 million coming through. I'm always happy, Mr. Chairman, to see requests come for program dollars in Environment because I think that this has been a department that has taken the greatest number of hits over the past nine years, and it's interesting to see that the minister is addressing what I believe to be some of those concerns.

I'm happy to see the support here for the western provinces human and animal health study. It's too bad that the other provinces have not yet come up with their share or some portion of the contributions for this study, because they, too, will benefit from it. We could hope that industry would also be prepared to pay their fair share on this one because it is the effects of industry that we are actually seeing being studied, in this case on animal and human health.

Now, it's my position that Environment is responsible for the animal side of the study and that Health and Wellness is responsible for the human study side. As we saw today in question period, the health minister clearly doesn't have a clue what's going on in terms of that study, and it is our opinion that that money has not been properly spent or accounted for and that they haven't taken the right kinds of factors into account when taking a look at the studies themselves and how they'll be followed. We would hate to see this province put animal health before the needs of human health, but it certainly seems to be the road that the minister of health is traveling down. So what I have to say to that is: "Good news for Environment. Job well done. Hope you can recover some money from the other provinces and from industry." You put your colleague in Health and Wellness absolutely to shame, and we would expect him to step up to the plate and do the work that he is supposed to do.

We had a good discussion, I thought, with the minister this week on this particular study and on the changes that are happening in Climate Change Central and are quite satisfied with those, Mr. Chairman, and believe that while there are instances where the minister and I will disagree on how things are decided and how policy decisions are made, there isn't much to be concerned about in terms of how he's managing these two areas. We've had some

concerns about Climate Change Central because they seem to be a little slow off the mark, but I believe that the work they're doing is good. It may take them a while to get to where they need to be, but they are on that road. We'll be watching, but I'm hoping that I'll only have good things to say about that organization in the future.

We always have a concern about the estimates in terms of their not being broken down in more detail. We just get the line items and no specific detail, and sometimes it's hard to tie down ministers or their staff to get that feedback. Fortunately, we were able to in Environment this time, but I haven't even had time to talk to my other colleagues to see how those requests have gone in the other departments and whether or not they've gotten more feedback. I would continue to urge the government to work in a co-operative fashion in this matter because, quite frankly, we have less questions and less concerns and can actually make a contribution in some instances to good strong policy decisions, and we would hope that that's the route that most ministers would choose to take.

Justice is getting \$1.5 million to provide for increased costs due to salaried staff settlements. So we see this as an ongoing issue in a couple of areas, and my question is: how can it be that the government doesn't manage effectively enough that they understand that these salary negotiations are coming down the pipe and that there is every expectation that people will get increases that are at least similar to the kinds that we as politicians get, tied to the weekly wage in this province. If we're prepared to do that for ourselves, then why is the government not prepared to do that with other organizations that they need to negotiate and deal with at a minimum.

It would appear that in this department and several others in terms of these estimates requested, the government wasn't prepared to do that and hadn't put any kind of process in their management plans where they have the flexibility to accommodate those requests and settlements as they occurred, so they come back in supplementary estimates. To me that is indicative of poor management, Mr. Chairman, and we would expect the government to do a lot better so that they don't have to come back for more money when issues should have already been dealt with earlier in the fiscal year. It indicates that there is no plan, which we have been saying for a long time, or that there is a plan perhaps and it is just to squeeze people other than themselves when it comes to salary negotiations. I think that that's something that has to happen.

8:10

Also, it's touching the surface of the kind of issues that we see occurring in Justice with their staff. There aren't enough judges; there aren't enough clerks; there aren't enough support staff. We've got huge backlogs. That creates an astronomical amount of problems, but even more than that, to speak in terms that this government understands, it costs money to have those kinds of backlogs. Unfortunately, that's what we see happening: to try and save a penny, this government has cost the taxpayers a pound. Inefficient management is costly; there are no two ways about it. So they need to get their act together. I seriously hope that we're going to see that kind of management as an issue addressed in the budget and that we could look to some sort of improved record in that regard, but that's not likely because they haven't been able to figure it out for almost the last decade.

The Solicitor General asks for almost \$4.4 million. Again, staff settlements: same issues that I talked about in Justice. I think that now is the time to start asking whether or not these new divisions of ministries have actually been effective or if they were just good excuses to give more people frontbench positions and the salaries that go along with that, Mr. Chairman. It doesn't seem to me that

we have met the needs of the people better or been more efficient or more effective in the delivery of services, which should be the kind of benchmarks that the government looks at when they decide how they're going to overhaul how government is delivered to the people. Maybe there's some obscure plan in the back of their minds that will prove to be efficient sometime in the future, but I doubt it, and I think that all those people directly affected by the salary negotiations this year would also doubt it. I look forward to being corrected by the Premier or any minister who would like to come forward and share their long-term strategic vision with us and a framework that's actually going to deliver services in an effective and efficient way, Mr. Chairman, but I'm not holding my breath.

So with those comments I believe that I have finished talking about supplementary estimates for this particular time. Let's hope that we don't have to come back two times in the next fiscal year for the same kinds of issues.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Having confirmed that my memory is inaccurate along with some of the other members', that in fact we did get to vote on Bill 2, as the transcript of *Hansard* clearly indicates – it obviously was a very smooth, quick vote on Bill 2 – I would like to move that we rise and report on Bills 1, 2, and 8.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 1, 2, and 8.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Horner moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 5: Mr. Johnson]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. [some applause]

MR. MASON: Thank you, one hon. member, two, three. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and give my reply to the Speech from the Throne, delivered at the opening of the session by Her Honour the Honourable Lois Hole, the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. I feel proud to be represented by Mrs. Hole in her capacity as the Lieutenant Governor of this province. I don't think that we could ask for a better representative of our province.

I want to indicate that I listened with great care to Her Honour and have had a chance to go through the Speech from the Throne a little more thoroughly subsequent to that time, and I find it's an interesting document, Mr. Speaker. It talks about and its headline is Working Together to Build a Healthy Alberta. That is a very, very laudable goal. I congratulate the government on that title of this speech, because I think that is quite frankly its strongest point, the title. It's interesting that the government has chosen the theme of a healthy Alberta for this Speech from the Throne. It seems to have a couple of trends, a couple of elements. One is a healthy individual and health in its classical sense: the health of someone, absence of disease, and wellness, those things. It also then talks about the health of the province, and I think that is very appropriate. So I would like my remarks to follow along those two themes.

Increasingly, research and people who study the question of health of individuals and of communities have come to the conclusion that one of the biggest single indicators of health for an individual and indeed for a community, even including up to a province, is the absence of poverty, specifically the absence of relative poverty. Recently in Edmonton we had a speaker, Richard Wilkinson, who is a health policy senior research fellow at the Trafford centre for medical research, the University of Sussex in the U.K. He's written a book called *Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality*, and he says that

among the developed countries it is not the richest societies which have the best health, but those that have the smallest income differences between rich and poor. Inequality and relative poverty have absolute affects: they increase death rates.

He goes on to say in the book that

research is increasingly able to document the human costs of particular features of the social and economic structure of modern societies. In particular, the underlying causes and pathways responsible for the excess mortality which occurs in less privileged sections of society are becoming clearer. Not unexpectedly, their broad outlines have much in common with the likely sources of a number of other social problems – including emotional disturbance in childhood, poor educational performance, crime and violence.

Now, it's interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, that these conclusions are reflected in some of the background documents prepared for the Mazankowski report.

8:20

MR. MacDONALD: What's that report again?

MR. MASON: It's the Mazankowski report, sometimes known as the 'Mazankofski' report.

The background paper, the context paper Opportunity for People and Communities to Improve Their Own Health, prepared by Larry Bryan, says on page 18 that "income-related disparities in infant mortality are two-thirds higher in the poorest neighborhoods than [in] the richest." It goes on to say people in the lowest income households were nearly twice as likely to smoke compared to those in the high-income households. He says:

- Those with low incomes were more likely than those with higher incomes to: be heavy users of physician services, visit [emergency rooms], be admitted to hospital, take multiple medications and require home care services.
- Seniors with low incomes have increased odds of institutionalization.

All of these, Mr. Speaker, are contained in the context paper for the Mazankowski report, and indeed the Mazankowski report includes some positive recommendations with respect to those things. But does it go far enough?

I think, more importantly, the question is for the government and for the Speech from the Throne. If in fact the theme of the Speech from the Throne is the health of the individual and the health of the province, then why is there not one word in it about poverty? Can we say that poverty is not a problem or that it's going away as a result of the economic boom caused by relatively high energy prices? Well, a couple of years ago the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association released a report, and it indicated for a number of cities – large, medium, and small – in the province that poverty rates continue to be a very, very serious problem, ranging from in excess of 15 percent in the cities with the lowest poverty rate to over 20 percent in the centre with the highest rate, which happens to be the city of Edmonton, Mr. Speaker.

Nearly 1 in 5 Albertans lives at or below the poverty line, and we have a situation where the government policies are tending to widen the gap between rich and poor in our province. Statistically this can be shown. The policies of flat tax, the policies of user fees such as health care premiums, ironically, are contributing to the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor in this province, which according to experts is the single biggest determinant of illness and lack of health in a community.

So, Mr. Speaker, the government talks about health as its priority, yet it cuts preventative programs for children's services. It drags its feet on the low-income review. It brings in taxation policies that favour rapid accumulation of wealth at the high end of the scale and which create difficulties, financial and otherwise, for people at the low-income end of the society. A number of years ago, not too long ago, the government completely walked away from all social housing programs even though these had been devolved from the federal government at the request of the provinces, who claimed that it was constitutionally within their jurisdiction. When the federal government did that, the reaction of the government of Alberta immediately was, essentially, to get completely out of that business.

So we have a serious problem with health, and, Mr. Speaker, I would submit that the government is complicit in that, has created conditions and policies which foster that. I find it ironic indeed that the major thrust of the Speech from the Throne deals with improving the health of Albertans. Clearly, not all Albertans are equal, in the government's view, when it comes to health.

Now, the other question, Mr. Speaker, is the health of our communities, the health of our province, and the government is quite rightly talking about a strong and resilient economy. I will not stand here and deny that the economy has been growing rapidly in Alberta, that the rate of industrialization has been increasing, and that more Albertans are working now than a few years ago. But does that mean that the province is healthier? I think in one sense it is, but in a number of other senses it's not healthier, and there are a number of issues that I think need to be addressed in terms of the health of the province.

One of the major ones is the state of the environment. There's also a very well written section in the Speech from the Throne about the environment of our province, but the words belie the reality once again, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the government talks about the grave concerns it has about the Kyoto accord, this in a section that's entitled A Clean and Sustainable Environment. The government is pleased to provide Albertans with a variety of different numbers on the costs of Kyoto for Alberta. Sometimes the numbers provided are correct and sometimes they're not, but I think that they are all inflated and take no account of the costs of continued changes in the

climate on Alberta. We are faced with a dramatic situation of ongoing drought year after year in the southern part of this province. Now, any climate expert worth their salt will tell you that one of the effects of climate change in our particular area of geography is increasing drought in certain parts of the continent, especially those parts towards the interior of the continent, such as southern Alberta.

Where in the analysis of the costs of the Kyoto accord to the Alberta economy does the government subtract the cost of not doing something about global warming and climate change? Where does it add on the balance sheet the costs of drought to Alberta farmers, the costs to the government? Where does it add the dramatic costs for fighting forest fires? Where are its projections and its analysis of the impact over a period of time of this steadily worsening situation on the economy, not to mention the people, not to mention the environment and the flora and the fauna? Since the government likes to place everything in the context of numbers and money, it seems to me that the analysis around failing to deal with climate change ought to be clearly part of the planning documents of the province.

8:30

Now, we've just learned more recently that Alberta now is running out of water for economic growth. This is after the government has worked very hard to promote industrial development all around the province, no longer limited to cities, but you can see it now spread out all over the province helter-skelter as it sprawls across the face of the province. The government's quite right in pointing out that that produces jobs for people. It does. But, Mr. Speaker, on the other hand there is a cost to it.

Particularly I want to come to the question of the agricultural policy of this government, which promotes intensive livestock operations and has yet to deal with the ecological and health effects of some of those operations, particularly those of a very large scale. The Premier, of course, as we know, has suggested that the number of hogs in the province ought to be dramatically expanded.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that the government speaks out of both sides of its mouth with respect to the question of environment and of health of individuals of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands was quoting extensively from the Mazankowski report, linking health and wealth. I'm wondering how the second member of the third party is proposing to end poverty in Alberta. Is it through increased taxation and more government handouts?

MR. MASON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the 71st member of the first party by suggesting that a variety of measures would be appropriate. It is particularly the style of taxation which benefits wealthy people at the expense of poor people which we think ought to be changed, not necessarily increasing taxation for everybody but ending the tax holidays for the wealthy people.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Anybody else wishing to ask a question or make comments? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. I was interested in his comments with respect to Kyoto and the inference that the provincial government has their numbers

wrong. I'd like the hon. member to explain to me to what degree global warming will be reduced once Canada ratifies Kyoto.

MR. MASON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was reading with interest the comments in the paper the other day of Dr. Schindler, who's a world-renowned expert, who said that it would take four Kyotos to actually deal effectively, and obviously Kyoto is a compromise because of the opposition of the United States and particularly the current president who is, as we all know, very closely associated with the oil and gas industry in that country.

MS DeLONG: I also have a further question. It seems that you missed answering the question in terms of the effects of Canada signing the Kyoto agreement. We already know the U.S. isn't going to. Okay? So what would be the effects of Canada signing the Kyoto?

MR. MASON: Well, it's obviously better than doing nothing. It is a small step. You know, a journey of a hundred miles begins with a single step, and if we refuse to take that step, then we will not leave the Earth to our grandchildren in any fit condition. In fact, there will be mass starvation, desertification, and depopulation of the human race.

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

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to address a question to the hon. member opposite in a similar vein, the concern about Kyoto. I'm wondering if the hon. member opposite is aware that the Bloc Quebecois have made statements to the effect that Alberta should bear most of the brunt for Canada's entire commitment to Kyoto. Does the hon. member's party support the Bloc Quebecois in their quest to have Kyoto put mostly on Alberta?

MR. MASON: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Incidentally, I'd rather be the 71st member of a party with 73 than the second member of a party of two.

Some strong accusations in that speech. I was wondering if the member could state which numbers from Alberta Environment are false or inflated, as he mentioned, and if he would be willing to table documents to prove such allegations.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I could table the minister's correction in the House to his comments.

DR. TAYLOR: Unfortunately, I missed some of what the member was saying.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Environment, but the five minutes allocated for questions and answers are up.

Would any other hon. member wish to respond to the Speech from the Throne? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to rise this evening and address Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor and the Speech from the Throne. It is always a pleasure to have her presence in the Assembly and listen as she

reads the Speech from the Throne. I know that not only myself but many members in the Assembly look forward to her little side comments, which add her own personal touch to the speech.

Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the words of the Lieutenant Governor, particularly as she outlined the direction we as a province are to travel in the coming year, and it struck me that some concerns of Albertans were not being addressed. Albertans look forward to the Speech from the Throne as it provides us with some sense of purpose, a plan that not only recognizes the challenges we face as legislators but also sets a course of action to meet our goals. This is critical, as one of the government's major roles is to create a stable environment for Albertans. In the Speech from the Throne this very theme was echoed by the participants at the Future Summit. "They are determined to build an Alberta for their children that is prosperous, caring, secure, and that above all maintains a positive, healthy outlook to meet the challenges it will invariably face."

Mr. Speaker, one of the roles of government in developing that stable environment for business, for our municipalities, and for Albertans is to provide stable, equitable, predictable long-term funding. The onetime roller-coaster model currently employed by the government is not working. In a time when we have had the second most money come into our coffers in the history of this province and we are making cutbacks, it is unforgivable.

Planning by our municipalities and businesses which rely on provincial dollars is difficult at best when funding is clawed back or projects are deferred or canceled. The cuts to the fuel tax rebate program, which amounted to approximately \$10 million for Edmonton and \$12 million for Calgary, lead to a lack of trust and respect that municipalities have for their provincial counterparts. When the province makes a deal with municipalities to provide funding and then reneges on that agreement, the planning and budgetary process for the municipalities is thrown into disarray. It is unacceptable to download this responsibility to municipalities without giving them access to appropriate funding.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Roadbuilders and Heavy Construction Association has also expressed concern over the present funding practices of this government. They have studied the recent projected cuts to the Alberta Transportation budget for the coming year, and if these cuts are confirmed, their studies indicate large job losses and a strong possibility of business failures due to the sudden loss of cash flow.

The Official Opposition does have an alternative to the current budget practices of the government. We have proposed a fiscal stability fund. Unlike the heritage savings trust fund this fund would be a short-term savings account meant to smooth out the peaks and valleys of our volatile economy. We would contribute to the fund during good years. When our revenues fall, money would be withdrawn so essential programs like health care, education, children's services, and infrastructure enhancement would continue as planned. This would not be used to fund new initiatives and programs but, rather, to maintain existing essential services.

The second fund is a targeted savings account called the infrastructure enhancement fund. As we know, in some years in Alberta there is a lot of money to go around. During these years we would be able to put money into this fund to pay for the acceleration or enhancement of infrastructure projects in the following year. This means that once the money is in the bank, projects can be announced and contracts signed.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this statement in the Speech from the Throne: "Indeed, in 2002 Albertans perceive health and health care

to be a top priority." Health care has been at the top or near the top of priorities of Albertans for many years. They want a public health care system there for them when they need it. They are very concerned when the government talks about services that are to be deinsured. They are very concerned when they see an increase in their health care premiums of up to 40 percent. This increase is nothing more than a head tax. Albertans are very concerned as this government moves towards a health care system which is market driven even though there is an abundance of evidence which shows that private, for-profit medicine increases costs and waiting times in the public system and increases administration waste and creates barriers to equal access.

In a province as rich as Alberta, Mr. Speaker, no sick or injured person should ever go without medical attention because they are poor and cannot afford it. No Albertan should ever have to choose between putting food on the table or taking care of their medical needs. These decisions are being made more frequently by people on fixed incomes as they get squeezed by increases in the cost of living. Albertans get very concerned when they look at the American model of health care and see that 40 million Americans have no health care coverage – 40 million Americans have no health care coverage – and that the leading cause of personal bankruptcies in the United States is health care.

One of the targets to increasing revenues for stable, long-term funding for health is to increase taxes on tobacco products. If this government has identified the use of tobacco products as a contributor to the poor health of Albertans, why have they not made this entire Legislature Building a smoke-free building?

Once again in the Speech from the Throne we see education listed as a priority of the government. The major unresolved issues in the recent strike by 21,000 Alberta teachers have been identified for a number of years, but the government has failed to address the concerns as raised by the ATA. Failure to do so eventually led to the largest strike in this province's history. According to a one-page summary of education spending prepared by Alberta Learning and leaked to the press, spending on education rose 34.6 percent between 1992-93 and 2001. By Alberta Learning's own assertion education spending has not even returned to the 1992-93 levels when inflation and student population growth are factored in. The fact is that funding for education is \$64 million lower than it was in 1992-93 when adjusted for inflation and student population growth. That's a 2.33 percent decrease and a far cry from the government's claims that education spending has risen dramatically. And this, Mr. Speaker, occurred when times were good in this province.

We go forward in the Speech from the Throne to praise student achievement when compared against students internationally. Mr. Speaker, if teachers were in private business and had results like have been mentioned in the Speech from the Throne and by other members in this Assembly, they would not only get double-digit raises, but they would also get bonuses in the double-digit range. The Premier had raised the expectations of teachers with comments prior to last year's budget. Teachers were shocked when they saw a line item limiting their raises to 4 and 2 percent. When other sectors funded from provincial revenues were getting double-digit raises, teachers got a total of 6 percent. It is not unreasonable that when other issues designed to improve classroom conditions were ignored and no commitment was made to build and improve the education system for tomorrow, the only alternative for teachers was job action.

In a keynote address to the Conservative policy conference in April of 1999, Eric Newell, chairman of Syncrude Canada, said that Albertans risk being unable to realize their dreams because the government isn't spending enough on education or on research and development.

During question period on February 29, 2000, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods asked the Provincial Treasurer of the day the following question:

On the Wednesday before last week's budget the Treasurer promised Albertans that 2,200 new teachers and teaching aides would be hired. The 2,200 teachers and aides were part of a list that supposedly included more computers, severe disability funding, expanded early literacy programs, and increases in teachers' salaries.

The government knew of these unresolved issues but chose to continue underfunding public education in this province. What is unreasonable is that the government knew a strike was looming yet did absolutely nothing to prevent it. Hopefully the anticipated meeting between the Premier and the president of the ATA, which has taken place, will result in positive action that will avert any more job action by teachers in this province.

Mr. Speaker, not all Albertans are sharing in the benefits of our fast-growing economy in this province. Homelessness and a growing shortage of housing affordable by low- and moderate-income households is an escalating issue. It is severe for those with fixed incomes, particularly in our larger cities of Edmonton and Calgary. *This Quarter*, a publication which provides information on the city's current activity and issues, indicates that there is

a need for at least 5,000 more low-income and special-needs housing units in Edmonton. The need ranges from subsidized housing for low-income families through to short-term, emergency shelter for people with no home but the streets.

Mr. Speaker, events of September 11, 2001, harshly reminded us of how small our world has become and of our role and responsibilities as members of the international community. I look forward to new legislation referred to in the Speech from the Throne which will be introduced this session to improve the province's ability to protect Albertans, their property, their infrastructure, and their environment from potential security risks.

But our responsibilities as members of the global community extend far past the borders of this province. At a recent meeting of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund I made a proposal that we should adopt a policy of ethical investing when it comes to the fund. Ethical funds represent about 3 percent of all mutual fund assets, but asset growth recently has been around 75 percent per year. In the United States social and ethical funds account for 13 percent of the market, with a growth rate almost as high as that in Canada.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, socially responsible investing is increasing because investors realize that what is bad for society is also bad for business. I am certain that Albertans do not want us investing their money if a company's practices go against social standards. Investors take environmental, social, and community interests into account when they decide which companies to invest in. This is an area where we as a province could take a lead.

Mr. Speaker, as my time winds down on my response to the Speech from the Throne, I have to briefly mention the Alberta advantage. Certainly when we look at the Alberta advantage, the major reason we have an Alberta advantage is the people, but we also have other reasons. We have an agriculture industry that was recognized by people around the world before we became a province. When we look at our forestry industry, which also plays a major role in this province, it again has been recognized since before the turn of the century. When Peter Pond in 1778 recorded the occurrence of bituminous sands at the confluence of the Athabasca and Clearwater rivers, we knew that we had an Alberta advantage.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we need in this province certainly isn't to

create wealth. What we need in this province is to redistribute that wealth to all members of the province.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Any questions or comments for the hon. member? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if the Member from Edmonton-Glengarry could expand on how he would increase the transportation budget from a so-called fiscal stability fund this year when this year would actually be a year of contributing to such a fund according to the Liberal model of contributing in years above the five-year average of resource revenues?

MR. BONNER: That is a very good question and one that should be answered because the road builders of Alberta definitely would like an answer to that, particularly when their anticipated budget has been cut somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$700 million. If we had an infrastructure enhancement fund, then those moneys which would have been put in there as we use our five-year average could have been used to keep those people in business today instead of laying off workers.

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

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the hon. member opposite. During my time as a stockbroker I did considerable research on social and ethical investment funds. Unfortunately, they had an extremely dismal rate of return in comparison to most other funds. I'm wondering if the hon. member opposite would like to elucidate on whether or not he thinks we should still invest in those funds even if they have a far lower rate of return than other funds.

MR. BONNER: Actually at one time, as people got more involved in ethical investing and socially responsible investing, I probably thought that it was a slow-growth market. But certainly all the research indicates today that ethical investing in the long run is going to provide much more of a stable environment for investing because we don't have environmental concerns to clean up after, we don't have violations against human rights in other countries.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our hon. colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry very nicely outlined many things that would be very nice to spend more money on, and I could add another 10, 20, or 30 that would do wonderful things for Alberta. But the question, of course, is: where do you want to take the money from? You were talking about large amounts of money here. You're talking hundreds of millions, billions of dollars.

MR. BONNER: An excellent question. Our biggest problem, Mr. Speaker, in this province is that we have a boom-and-bust economy. As well, in this beautiful province we do have oil reserves which are running dry. These are not the oil reserves that are in the Fort McMurray region but in the western Canada basin. So it is essential that we smooth out the peaks and valleys with some type of an enhancement fund.

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

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry would tell the House: if the circumstances were to be such that this province did have a Liberal government, would the first priority be the redistribution of wealth or would the first priority be the creation of wealth?

MR. BONNER: Yes. Certainly, in reply to the hon. member's question, the first priority of a Liberal government would be to establish a budget which was sustainable. Mr. Speaker, we would make certain that the funding for all programs in this province was predictable, sustainable, and we know that this would be of benefit to all.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. My question to the hon. member. First of all, I want to make a comment and thank him so much for recognizing the Alberta advantage in Fort McMurray. That is very important.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt, but the allocated five minutes are up.

The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do now move that we adjourn debate on this particular item.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 5
Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act

[Adjourned debate March 5: Mr. Stevens]

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 5 in second reading in the Assembly. At the rate that we're ripping through these early bills, it's going to be not very long before we're through the entire agenda that this government has brought forward. [some applause] While government members have just applauded that particular concept, what it means is that there isn't very much meat and substance in what we've seen so far.

AN HON. MEMBER: Good planning. Good planning.

MS CARLSON: It's not good planning.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's called co-operation.

MS CARLSON: Co-operation. Well, yeah, we're happy to co-operate in some instances, but certainly we're looking forward after this spring break to seeing some more substantive items coming forward. However, that isn't to say that some of the bills we have seen have not been good.

DR. OBERG: Be careful what you ask for.

MS CARLSON: That's okay. We're happy to be in there. I know

you don't like to be here, but, Mr. Speaker, we're happy to deal with substantive issues that make a difference to Albertans, so we'll be here as long as it takes to settle some of those outstanding issues. [interjections] Yes, yes, especially me. I'd like to be here, you know, right till July.

AN HON. MEMBER: All four of you?

MS CARLSON: It only takes one of us. You guys have got to keep quorum, not us.

AN HON. MEMBER: All four of you and one sidekick, eh?

MS CARLSON: No, it doesn't take that many. We've had lots of evenings when just one of us has been able to keep the business of the Assembly going for quite a long time.

On Bill 5, Mr. Speaker, I am quite happy to support this particular bill. It is a step forward in terms of interjurisdictional support orders, and that happens to be an issue that I deal with quite frequently in my constituency. Not only is there a large number of single parents in my constituency, but people seem to have known over the years that I also have been a single parent for many years, soon to be 16 years, and certainly understand the issues that come up around moneys and custody and trying to raise children on low-paying or small-paying or part-time jobs. So this is an issue that I understand, I believe, quite well from both personal and practical experience and having to negotiate and lobby for any number of single parents over the years, both male and female, who have had problems receiving support from their estranged spouses.

9:00

What we see, then, in terms of the highlights in this particular bill is that there's going to be some uniform legislation developed by provinces and territories. We've seen it passed in Manitoba, it's been introduced in Ontario and the Yukon, and we can only hope that soon we'll see it in the other provinces as well. Without a doubt, the biggest issue we have with nonpaying, noncustodial spouses is that they simply move out of the province in order to evade their responsibilities and become deadbeat dads or moms. They just laugh at the custodial parent when they try to get the moneys that are owed to them, because there are no arrangements interprovincially that work well.

What we find here with maintenance enforcement is that they don't even address the issues that are out of province in any kind of serious and significant fashion. They write these issues off quite quickly, and we see people who are really having trouble raising their kids and not getting support from the natural parents of that child. It's really important that we have this kind of interjurisdictional support for this particular issue. This bill brings forward those issues, lines them up properly and makes sure that we're going to see an improved way for support orders to be attained or varied between the jurisdictions. So it's a good step in the right direction.

I would wish that the legislation was tougher. I would wish that we would see really tough penalties in this regard for nonpaying spouses, and I would wish that we would see a bigger overall maintenance enforcement. It is a problem in many ways, for people who hide assets are still getting away with it. Decades after the program was first introduced, we still have people who are very adept at hiding assets and a maintenance enforcement program that is slow and cumbersome in its responses. It's sometimes successful but not very often. We see a judicial system that isn't lined up to support maintenance enforcement when they do finally haul a

deadbeat parent into court. So we need to see an alignment there in terms of seeing the needs of children being met as the first priority, rather than the abilities of these people to get away with nonpayment.

We also need to see a change in the way of thinking, I believe, about noncustodial parents who are falsely accused of not providing support. We have some instances where that's an issue. We also have some discrimination issues around primarily men who are custodial parents in terms of getting their access, in terms of just the way maintenance enforcement deals with them on their own. It seems that they often will assume right off the bat that the male parent is the offending parent. It's certainly not the case in my constituency. I have an increasing number of custodial parents who are male and who are doing an excellent job of raising their children and have the same issues with their estranged spouses in terms of money collection and in terms of them leaving the province and just never coming up with the kind of support that is reasonable and can be expected.

So this is a really good, strong step in the right direction, but it certainly isn't enough in terms of this particular issue, Mr. Speaker, and I would hope that the member who is the sponsor of this bill and the minister will seriously undertake to do a thorough and systematic review of the process and bring forward legislation soon to address some of these issues. This is something that I think is an issue that we could have all-party support on, all-party co-operation as we work through the issues. We all know what they are. Let's sit down at a table, identify the top priorities, and start to address them. This is the kind of issue where we could see some excellent work being done in this province. We have seen some of that kind of co-operation happen in this Legislature in the past, and it would be very interesting and productive to see it happen again. This is exactly the kind of issue that we could look forward to working with the government on.

So I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say about that and applaud them on at least bringing this forward as a first step in this process.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Any questions or comments for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: I wonder what the hon. member opposite would think about the notion of having a court-ordered maintenance payments source deduction and then the resulting funds going to the recipient so as to be a separation from the sometimes heat that's generated through access when one parent is not paying and the other parent has refused access.

MS CARLSON: Well, the member should know that, in essence, that is what happens with maintenance enforcement now. When families are separated, when there is a divorce, there is automatically an application given to the custodial parent to apply for the maintenance payments to go to maintenance enforcement and then delivered to them to make that kind of division. The problem, as I see you saying it, is that it doesn't first go to payable deductions. That would be an improvement. They get there eventually.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Is there any other member who wishes to ask a question of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie? I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The notion would be that the payment would be a source deduction similar to tax and would go through the federal government so that the recipient

custodial parent would have a consistent source of funds. Therefore, any shortages or if the funds are not paid by the parent, it would be handled exactly the same as a tax deduction not paid, removing the heat between the estranged parents, thereby providing access for the noncustodial parent.

MS CARLSON: It's a good idea. It happens now in terms of when maintenance enforcement garnishees wages, and they do that with the employer. That's a little more acrimonious, so this may be something serious to look at. However, having said that, to speak in defence of noncustodial parents, some of them really don't want that kind of information to happen. They don't want to see the enforcement orders and have been very good at making payments regularly and consistently. So there still, I think, needs to be an opt-out clause for both parties, but I think that would help.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay, is there anybody else who wishes to ask a question?

Anybody else wishing to speak on the bill? There is a member who wishes to speak on the bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point I would like to get on the record regarding Bill 5, and certainly I would like to offer my support to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder in regards to this bill. Any time there can be an improvement in the contentious issues that can surround maintenance enforcement, I think it is a valid objective.

Now, to improve the process for obtaining and varying support orders where the claimant and the respondent live in separate jurisdictions. There are many times in the constituency office of Edmonton-Gold Bar that individuals come in and express a great deal of frustration, and if this legislation will reduce that frustration, which perhaps it will, then I'm in full support of it. I don't know how other hon. members of this Assembly feel about this or how often they get constituents coming with a great deal of frustration.

9:10

Now, this new legislation will also deal with how support orders made outside of Alberta can be registered and enforced in Alberta, and there are many examples by members from all parties in this Assembly talking about how individuals are coming to Alberta. They're coming from B.C., they're coming from Saskatchewan, they're coming from Manitoba, from all over Canada, to work here and carry on their lives. This legislation is to replace Alberta's existing enforcement of the Maintenance Order Act with legislation that's consistent across provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

I think everyone should support this legislation. I would encourage all members, Mr. Speaker, to do so. This legislation, in my view, should make it easier for claimants to obtain an initial support order within the framework of reciprocating jurisdictions. It will also, in my view, allow for a streamlining of court proceedings, and this should result in more efficient processing of applications and thus improve services to all Albertans. It is extremely important that the legislation be consistent with that of other jurisdictions; namely Ontario, Manitoba, and the Yukon.

Now, with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I shall cede the floor to another hon. member of this Assembly who would like to participate in the debate. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Any questions or comments for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder to close debate.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise and close debate on Bill 5, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act. I note that the Official Opposition has agreed to this bill in principle. Yesterday, following my much heralded and accoladed speech in second reading, the Member for Edmonton-Centre posed a number of technical questions, and I propose to deal with those technical answers in Committee of the Whole.

So, in closing, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act will streamline the process for obtaining and varying court orders under provincial or territorial legislation when the parties live in different jurisdictions. Rather than a court hearing taking place in each jurisdiction, one single court hearing would occur in the respondent's jurisdiction, which will allow for quicker enforcement of Canadian orders once they are registered in Alberta.

I believe that all members who have spoken on this bill are in

favour of the principles of the legislation, and I encourage all members to support Bill 5 at second reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 9:15 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

