

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 16, 2002**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 02/04/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others. We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of our Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 10 staff members from Alberta Justice, legal services. They are Mrs. Sue Lefebvre, Ms Greta Lankoff, Ms Joyce McKenzie, Mr. Doug Wolch, Mrs. Michelle Iverson-Marshall, Mrs. Myriam Murray, Miss Christie Wade, Mr. Bob Lisevich, Ms Darlene Moser, and Mrs. Karen Janz. The minister has asked me to thank these hardworking staff members for their diligent service, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a large group of students from Brookwood elementary. We have in both galleries today 95 very well-behaved and bright students from Spruce Grove. They are accompanied today by their teachers and a large group of parent helpers including Parkland school trustee Lori Benner. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature my uncle, Walter Halbach, who is visiting us from Jackson, Mississippi. He is seated in the members' gallery, and he has come to observe how we govern ourselves in the fine province of Alberta. So I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to the House a very active group from my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands. The five members belong to a group called the Edmonton-Highlands health care action group. They formed because they are concerned with the future of health care in Alberta. They are developing a submission to the Romanow commission and are very active in making sure that their community is well advised on the government's direction in health care. They are to be congratulated for their hard work and dedication. I'm happy to introduce Sandra Barnes, Cindy Drummond, Vivian Cheperdak, Remi Genest, and

Ross Deacon. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

School Fund-raising

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Legislate, regulate, castigate: that appears to be the way the Ministry of Learning deals with problems. Parents are the latest group to be attacked for simply filling the gaps in underfunded schools. My questions today are to the Minister of Learning. Given that the government committed in Bill 12 to examine the learning system, which, one assumes, would include resources, why has the minister undermined the work of this committee before they even get started?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, probably two years or two and a half years ago I rose in this Legislature on numerous occasions to talk about fund-raising and this government's belief that parents should not be fund-raising for textbooks. Since that time a lot of things have changed in Alberta Learning. There have been roughly 25 percent – yes, 25 percent – more dollars go into the budget, especially for the budget on the K to 12 system. We presently spend about \$3.7 billion for the K to 12 system.

What the hon. member is alluding to are comments that I made about putting in a regulation or a policy or something in the funding manual that will limit parents' fund-raising for textbooks. I would bet you that probably in the last two and a half to three years the hon. opposition has raised the issue about parents fund-raising for textbooks at least five or six times. We are doing something about it. This is not acceptable. With \$3.7 billion going into the education system in Alberta for 550,000 students, I feel that every taxpayer has the right to demand that their kids have textbooks.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how will the minister stop parents fund-raising for items that free up money for the basics?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, what we will be doing is bringing forward a list, that probably will be more inclusionary as opposed to exclusionary, which will be saying that we feel that parents can fund-raise for things such as trips to Europe, trips to New York, rock-climbing walls, things like this that are outside of the curriculum but are the nice-to-haves in the school system. We will be bringing that list forward probably in the next two to three months. We are looking at how it can be done. But I will assure you that textbooks will not be on that list to fund-raise for.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Again to the same minister: how can the minister claim that schools are adequately funded when there are no standards for class size, school librarians, school counselors, or even the number of textbooks that children must have?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I have a little bit of a problem with that, and I'll use Edmonton as an example. I received a letter from the superintendent of the Edmonton Catholic school system that categorically states that their school system does not fund-raise for

textbooks. On the other hand, I hear from the Edmonton public school system that, yes, they do. The funding formula is the same for each of these school jurisdictions, so what inherently is the difference? This government believes that parents should not be fund-raising for textbooks, that the \$3.7 billion that goes into the K to 12 funding system is more than adequate to pay for textbooks, and that is something that we absolutely will not tolerate any longer.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Children in Care

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the *Korvette Crier* inquiry was released, more than two years after the Minister of Children's Services promised a review. Yet again we are seeing this government's abysmal record when it comes to children in care, and yet again we are seeing a lack of standards and a lack of guidelines for children in care. My questions are to the Premier. Why did it take more than two years for this inquiry to be completed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, for the details of that particular question I'll have the hon. Minister of Children's Services respond.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we conducted a special case review. We looked through all of the issues surrounding this. There were a number of different processes of looking at it. I should remind this Assembly that it was not only thoroughly looked at, that the person in question was taken through the courts, was jailed for two years, and is presently released on three years' probation. Clearly there has been significant follow-through on behalf of both the defendant and on behalf of Children's Services. We have continued right from the time of the case, from the first knowledge that we had of it on the death of the child, and received that tragedy with the most grave attitude and followed through with a number of things. Very recently, our initiation of the foster care review plan and how we train foster care parents is part of subsequent action we have taken in the department as a result of this tragic situation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. My next question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that the report calls for provincial standards for screening prospective foster parents, why were there no standards in place?

1:40

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would dispute the fact that there were no standards in place. The record of this particular case will show that in fact the standards for accreditation of agencies to identify and source foster workers were in place, but with the agency that was selected, the worker apparently was not aware of the fact that that particular foster family and that particular agency were not accredited for assuming this type of case and this particular case. There are standards in place. The fatality review has gone further. It has suggested that we communicate those standards, that we work on the enforcement of those standards. I'm very satisfied that over the last three years we've made significant strides.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want this Assembly to believe that we haven't been working with due diligence, particularly with First Nations communities. We have 17 delegated authorities. For the most part they're doing an exceptional job. They continue to improve every day, and we continue to work with them and with the

foster families that they have within their employment as well. We are working on training programs. We are looking very assertively at other programs that the Child Welfare League of Canada has in place, PRIDE, and other training programs as well to assist foster families. In First Nations communities – one final point – it's very hard to find foster families to do the job, and we're making a plea regularly through the Metis nation association and through other native groups in Alberta to continue to try and increase the roster of foster families that will help us look after these children.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how will the minister respond to the recommendation that the entire system be reviewed?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been doing continuous review in Children's Services of our systems. This is one part of the system, and this is one particular area that we are working and focusing on. Throughout the last three years, I would suggest, we have done a great deal to initiate and follow through with that review and make significant change.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Children's Advocate

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year the Children's Advocate's report provides details of how Alberta's child welfare system is rife with abuse, yet the government continues to ignore the recommendations. Now a class action suit may be filed on behalf of more than 400 children who were allegedly abused in one year alone. To the Minister of Children's Services: how many of the 13 recommendations from last year's Children's Advocate's report have been implemented?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, as soon as that report was delivered to me, not only did we look at those recommendations, but we examined every single case anecdotally identified in that report: every single case from the vantage point of what was said, when it was said, what information was delivered to the advocate's office. We have done our utmost to follow through on every single one of those particular cases and taken a look at it.

I think I should comment on one area right away to reduce this number that's being purported as the number of children that were harmed through any particular action. In that particular year, dealing with the substantiated cases, 18 children received some type of abuse while they were in the direct care of the province, not necessarily at the hands of their caregiver but by somebody's particular action. It may have even been a parent. Thirty-four children were found to have had some particular type of abuse through action taken beyond the scope of Children's Services but while Children's Services were involved in working with the family to provide supports for children who were at risk.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does it take the threat of a lawsuit to convince the minister that she must make changes in her department?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I previously answered that question by saying that on the very day that I received that report we were following up on every single aspect of it. We followed up on

everything from the situations that the advocate reported on to the types of actions that should be taken. It's quite clear that although not all recommendations in that report have been enacted, we are still reviewing how we work with the Children's Advocate in direct relationship to the child welfare directors in every authority. So the net result will be that children in the province will be better looked after, and in future the frequency of the dialogue between the advocate and the authority will ensure that we don't wait for some horror story to be printed, that we are acting immediately when we hear that children may be at risk or damaged.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: will the Premier act now to have the Children's Advocate report directly to the Assembly as an officer of the Legislature?

MR. KLEIN: I don't know why we would do that. The Children's Advocate is not hired by the Assembly, Mr. Speaker. Why would he report to the Assembly? He's hired by the government on behalf of the Department of Children's Services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

School Fund-raising (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last November 26 the Minister of Learning emphatically denied in this House that parents and children were fund-raising for school essentials. Yesterday the minister announced that he was considering passing regulations to prohibit fund-raising for such essentials. You don't pass laws and regulations to deal with a problem that doesn't exist. My question to the Minister of Learning: why is the minister proposing to put regulations in place to prohibit an activity which he has previously claimed is not taking place?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I will reiterate that back in September of the year 2000 the Alberta School Boards Association put out a document that in essence suggested and recommended to all their school boards that fund-raising for things such as textbooks be prohibited. I believe that the exact wording that they used was core curriculum materials. Since the time that the hon. member has cited in his question, I have received confirmation that there have been some individual schools that have been fund-raising for textbooks. We have done audits on these schools and found that it is not appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, I will add that a school in my own constituency wrote to me asking for money for textbooks. In contacting the superintendent and the board chairman of my own school board, they categorically refused to accept that this school had to do it. There were funds available for it, as there are funds available in every school jurisdiction. So quite simply, this is something that obviously has not been followed. The school boards have not followed the ASBA's recommendations, and quite literally it's time to do something about this.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is interesting that the

minister now recognizes that he misinformed the House in November. While the chair of the Edmonton public school board says that the funding we receive is inadequate to meet all needs within our district, the minister chooses to punish parents who raise money to make up for the funding shortfalls. Why?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, I found it quite interesting that the chairman of Edmonton public would come out when their own superintendent said that it was not necessary and was not needed in Edmonton public. So perhaps that's something that the chairman of the board of Edmonton public schools should talk to his superintendent about and come forward with a recommendation. If he comes forward and says that they definitely must fund-raise for textbooks in Edmonton public, then we would be looking very seriously at what is going on in Edmonton public.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the same minister: instead of addressing the underfunding of classrooms, why is the government choosing to use the force of law to make it illegal for parents to fund-raise for basic education requirements?

DR. OBERG: Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, it's the school boards' responsibility to provide things such as textbooks to their students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Employment Opportunities for Aboriginal Youth

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recent demographics of the aboriginal community show that their youth population has increased significantly. It is a well-known fact that the unemployment rate is very high in this community, especially among young people. My first question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Is your department working to ensure that aboriginal youth have employment opportunities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

1:50

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are aware of the fact that there will be and continue to be labour shortages in Alberta. The most obvious source, in my view, to address labour needs is to be able to deal with the fastest growing population. In fact, the aboriginal working-age population is growing at a rate four to five times higher than the nonaboriginal population. To ensure that aboriginal youth have employment opportunities, in this province we're blessed to have what I call a tool, the aboriginal policy framework, which provides us with the ability to act in two ways.

One is to be able to deal with it internally, and that's to be able to facilitate or collaborate via cross-ministry initiatives with a number of ministries involved. Just as an example, Mr. Speaker – I think this is really important – Alberta Sustainable Resource Development has been assisting aboriginal communities to obtain fire-fighting contracts worth approximately \$9 million. Another example: Alberta Transportation developed a number of contracts for transportation and civil projects for aboriginal lands which contained aboriginal content clauses for labour equipment and material resources.

The other component is the external component. When we're

talking about external, we're talking about working with First Nations, we're talking about dealing with Metis, and we're talking about dealing with the federal government and industry. We have in excess of 40 aboriginal industry and government partnerships currently in place in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we're starting, but we've still got a lot of work to do, and I look forward to working with my counterparts in these respects.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to direct my first supplementary question to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Mr. Minister, what is your department doing to assist aboriginal youth in the enhancement and development of skills?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the province values the full involvement of the aboriginal people within our economy, especially youth. We recently released a publication looking at the forward thinking and future planning of being able to meet the skill requirements that need to be available here in Alberta. From that report we did focus on aboriginal youth, so we are trying to raise the skill level of many of our young citizens here in Alberta.

We particularly want to increase partnerships. I might just anecdotally, then, make note of a recent project, the Precision Drilling initiative in Frog Lake, where 50 First Nations people were trained for jobs in the oil and gas sector. My colleague and I were out at the graduation ceremony, and there really seemed to be a lot of excitement around that particular partnership. So we're encouraging more situations like that, and of course, again, we're dealing with First Nations people in developing these skills.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental is to the Minister of Learning. Given that you recently signed an immigration agreement to provide an additional source of labour, what impact will this agreement have on the employment opportunities of our aboriginal youth?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the provincial nominee program stipulates that any employer applying for foreign workers to come in under that program must show that there is a shortage, so quite simply I don't feel that this will have any effect on the aboriginal youths. Obviously, as the previous two speakers said, it's a very important element of what we are attempting to do in Human Resources and Employment, Aboriginal Affairs, and Learning. However, to assure the hon. member, this will have in essence no effect on aboriginal youth employment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Regional Health Authority Budgets

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Northern Lights, Keeweenaw, Peace, Mistahia, Lakeland, WestView, East Central, Headwaters, Chinook, and No. 5 health regions are all either projecting budget shortfalls this fiscal year or looking at reducing services to meet their budgets. To the Minister of Health and

Wellness: how many millions of extra dollars will it cost RHAs to cover the 30 percent rise in health care premiums for their employees, that is simply paid back to the minister's own department?

MR. MAR: I'll undertake to look into that particular question that the hon. member asked, but I should remind him and members of the Assembly that health care is clearly the number one priority of this particular government, Mr. Speaker. The 7 percent increase in health care spending reflects that. About half of that went to regional health authorities. Yes, regional health authorities from rural Alberta have said: we need more. In some cases some of the regional health authorities got close to 7 percent, including a rural regional health authority, and they say: well, we actually need 15 percent. Well, that's not sustainable, and it speaks to the issue of the requirement of regional health authorities throughout this province to deal with their budgets, to plan, and to co-ordinate.

This is the key reason why, as set out in the Mazankowski report, there was a recommendation to look at collaboration and innovation. It's the reason why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora chairs a committee with our colleagues from Red Deer-North and from Highwood to look into ways that regional health authorities can collaborate with each other. Is there a compelling reason, Mr. Speaker, why every health authority should provide every service, or can there be examples of collaboration where they might share services or they might contract with each other or they might share an administration system or they might be contracting out for things like laundry?

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many opportunities for regional health authorities to do the things that they need to do to serve their constituencies within the budgets that have been allocated to them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many tens of millions of extra dollars will it cost RHAs to cover the rise in health care premiums and the cost of higher electricity prices?

MR. MAR: I can't speak to the issue of utility prices, Mr. Speaker, but I can say, again referring to the MLA Committee on Collaboration and Innovation, that we have to establish clear responsibilities that are government responsibilities and those which are RHA responsibilities, that we have to get RHAs to co-ordinate with each other so that they are not duplicating services, that we must develop areas of specialization. There are good examples of where that has worked in this province, and there must be much more of that in order for our system to be sustainable into the future.

An example raised by an hon. member here in this Assembly is the Health Link line run by the Capital region, that is co-ordinating its service, an exceptionally good service, I should say, Mr. Speaker, with the regional health authorities in the Peace region and in Mistahia. That is the key to how regional health authorities must deal with the issues that they have within their budgets.

DR. TAFT: Given that the funding formula for regional health authorities is based on historical utilization rates and costs, will additional funding be provided to RHAs to deal specifically with higher health care premiums and electricity costs?

MR. MAR: No, Mr. Speaker.

Minimum Wage Rate

MR. LORD: Mr. Speaker, a common question or theme often heard

when discussing poverty is to ask: why doesn't the government just raise the minimum wage rates to the point where poverty is just eliminated amongst the working poor? My questions are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Sir, the question is: since people are our greatest resource and British Columbia now has one of the highest minimum wage rates in the world, considerably higher than Alberta's, will this not lead to a tremendous drain of financially struggling people, such as most of our young people in this province, leaving the province to go after the higher minimum wages available in British Columbia?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I think the actual situation might be quite the opposite. When we look at the numbers, we see that with the migration flows of people, especially skilled labour, back and forth across the country, I think you would find that there are likely more British Columbians that have come to Alberta recently than are going the other way. So the concept, then, of what role a minimum wage might play in that I think is somewhat difficult. I think what we should do is take a look at some of the issues surrounding this particular matter.

2:00

For an example, if we were to look at youth unemployment, which, of course, is a concern to all the members of this Assembly, and compare British Columbia and Alberta, you will actually find that the youth unemployment rate is higher in British Columbia than it is in Alberta. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, Alberta, which realistically has one of the lower minimum wage rates in the country, is actually enjoying the lowest youth unemployment rate in the country. So I think we need to examine issues perhaps a little more closely than just falling into the trap that to up the minimum wage is somehow changing the complexity and the character of a workforce.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, if raising the minimum wage rate could just erase poverty, then why wouldn't this government just raise the minimum wage rate to a decent level of, say, \$15 or \$20 an hour and thus eliminate poverty?

THE SPEAKER: Well, methinks there's a lot of opinion going on in here.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, it's not that the hon. member hasn't heard those comments before, as I have as well, but I think we need to again just examine that situation, Mr. Speaker. Actually, one of the interesting facts that is revealed is that a full 98.5 percent of people employed in Alberta are paid at a rate higher than the minimum wage. Therefore, of course, doing the math, you have 1.5 percent that are currently at minimum wage. Then as we look at that area, we find that a tremendous amount of those people are actually young people and are students. So one of the things that is happening in Alberta is that there's a tremendous influx of youth into the workforce, and, yes, while they might start at a relatively low minimum wage, they're able, then, to move forward in those particular careers. So what we have is a minimum rate that doesn't kill jobs. We have a minimum rate that allows businesses to be competitive.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Yes. Mr. Minister, since businesses did get a little bit of a tax break this year, would this mean that they might be able to have a few more funds available to pay a little better wage rate to their employees as a result of that?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think this is something that most employers would look at. In many cases the minimum wage earners are working in accommodation, food services, and retail. Many of those particular areas are sort of the mom-and-pop shops that we all think about, and of course in those particular companies and enterprises the actual labour costs would be a high percentage of their input costs.

Let's remember that we're talking here about a minimum wage, Mr. Speaker. We're not talking about a maximum cap that people are allowed to pay their employees. So they can come in. They can start. They can start to become productive and, of course, like all of us be upwardly mobile, then, in a very hot economy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Swan Hills Waste Treatment Facility

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Finance minister continued to make confusing statements in the Assembly, and I would like to give her another opportunity to clarify her comments. To the Finance minister: from a financial perspective, will you please tell this Assembly how you can describe the Swan Hills waste treatment plant as "a phenomenal asset" when Alberta taxpayers are subsidizing the treatment of out-of-province waste?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, we have had the benefit of that disposal facility for a number of years now. We have been able to clearly see that Alberta is the one jurisdiction that is basically PCB free. We would not be in that environmental plus side of the equation if we had not had that facility here in our own backyard.

To add to the benefits of that facility and because I am losing my voice, I'm going to ask the Minister of Infrastructure to supplement the answer.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the opposition continues to make those accusations. They are certainly not accurate. The fact is that when you look at how important, as I said yesterday, the diet of the plant is and how that affects the operations – but another point that I neglected to mention yesterday was the fact that we can operate on the economies of scale. There is a very large cost regardless of how much waste you treat, so when in fact you bring in waste, the ability to reduce those costs per unit goes down. So to be making blanket statements that the out-of-province waste is costing us a lot of money I think is very misleading and unbecoming to the hon. member.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, white elephants do require economies of scale.

To the Finance minister: given that it is not beneficial for Albertans to dump their waste in someone else's yard, why does the minister support someone else's toxic mess being dumped in our yard and treated at taxpayers' expense?

MRS. NELSON: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure was quite clear. We have had the benefit of this waste disposal facility for a number of years. We have to dispose of our waste in one form or another. We are a highly economically active community in this province. With the economic development that has occurred, naturally we have produced more waste that has to go through a facility in some form or another. So choices had to be made: put the facility here to dispose of our own waste, whether it be an industrial waste or a medical waste, et cetera, or move it

somewhere else to dispose of it, because it has to be disposed of somewhere.

The benefit of bringing waste in from other jurisdictions, as the hon. Minister of Infrastructure has already said in the first answer, was that we do gain back some dollars and we also help our neighbours on either side to dispose of their waste. When you have a facility with capability and capacity available, why would you not open it up to the neighbours on either side? They pay for the disposal of their waste. It cuts the cost down. It's good for them. It's good for Canada. I don't understand, for the life of me, why the environmental critic over there is opposed to disposing of hazardous waste in her own backyard instead of having to ship it gosh only knows where to dispose of at whatever cost it would be on having to get extra special packaging and cargo things and separate containers to move it. I just fail to understand that.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier would like to supplement my answer.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, all I have to say is: will this hon. member travel to Swan Hills, stand in the town centre and say, "I want this plant closed"? I don't think so.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, given that the Finance minister knows that I support environmentally friendly, state-of-the-art technology, not white elephants, and given that their policy is to make polluters pay, will the Finance minister tell us: how does a \$28 million subsidy for the destruction of someone else's toxic mess become a higher priority than community lottery boards in this province?

MRS. NELSON: You know, Mr. Speaker, I'll be like the Premier. I would challenge this hon. member to go up to the community and call this a white elephant disposal facility in that community. More importantly, if this hon. member is so concerned with the environment, she would not reject the disposal of waste coming from the province of British Columbia. As I alluded to yesterday, I know perfectly well that blue asbestos was transported from Vancouver Island to this facility last year to dispose of blue asbestos, that they couldn't get rid of any other way, that was harming the people who were in the community of Nanaimo.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Domestic Violence

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During this government's review of the present Child Welfare Act and through consultations in communities throughout Alberta, some issues have arisen about reporting domestic violence to Alberta's policing agencies. It appears that there are women who have gone to women's shelters for care and protection who are not reporting to police the physical abuse and violence they have experienced. My first question is to the Solicitor General. Do Alberta's policing agencies have a zero tolerance approach to dealing with domestic violence complaints?

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Guidelines were issued to all police services in Alberta to ensure a uniform policy for handling family violence complaints. In Alberta if there is evidence to support a charge of domestic violence, it is mandatory for the

police to lay a charge. I will be meeting with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police in a few weeks, and I plan to talk to them about domestic violence.

The Alberta government is committed to providing safe communities for all Albertans, and that includes freedom from violence within our homes. I want to say very clearly that domestic violence is a crime, not just a problem or an issue. Victims of domestic violence do not have to stop the violence on their own. The criminal justice system can and will take an active role. It's a tragedy that domestic abuse is one of our most underreported crimes. For one reason or another, Mr. Speaker, only a small portion of abused women and men report the abuse to police. That is the issue that we need to focus on now, and I will continue to work on this important initiative with my colleagues the Children's Services minister and the Justice minister.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is again to the Solicitor General. Do we have programs in place to support victims of domestic violence?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The chiefs of police, the commanding officer of the RCMP, and the police commissions worked hand in hand with my department to develop and put in place a number of initiatives. There are training programs to ensure that police officers respond to the victims of domestic violence in a humane and caring way. Police services in Alberta's large urban centres have specialized domestic violence units. Some municipalities have established specialized services for family violence. As one example, the Edmonton Police Service has a child-at-risk response team to help the children who are also victims when there is domestic abuse in the home. In addition, the Protection against Family Violence Act was passed in Alberta in 1999, and under that act a victim of family violence can get an emergency protection order forcing the abuser out of the home.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has 108 victims' services units. These units provide information, assistance, and support to victims, including victims who are dealing with domestic violence. My ministry has provided financial assistance to these hardworking community organizations that focus on helping victims of domestic violence.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Children's Services. What supports does her ministry provide to women's shelters?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we provide \$14 million at least to women's shelters through operational funding of 27 shelters in the province, and we provide supports for looking after the children, for intervention when children have been victims by the watching of a violent act within the home. Child abuse, incidentally, is by law required to be reported by shelters to the police, and we don't insist that women report that abuse when they come to shelters. We try to empower them through education, increase their awareness, help them look after their family in their own immediate circumstances, and work, in fact, through the shelters and through the societies throughout Alberta to increase awareness of the damage that family violence does so that people will stop violence in the home and stop violence everywhere.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Correctional Work Camps

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. A 1995 efficiency review conducted by the correctional services division of the Department of Justice recommended that all except two of seven correctional camps be closed in order to save money. This recommendation was made because the camps were operating under capacity and experienced correctional officers were being forced to leave their families in order to work at these sites. My questions are to the Solicitor General. Why have the recommendations of the efficiency review not been implemented?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member brings up some good points, and one of the things that we're looking at and hoping to announce very shortly is a review of exactly the issues that she's discussing.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, why wasn't the review from 1995 implemented now that you have to do a second one? That's seven years.

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about the work camps that the hon. member is alluding to, we have to keep in mind that these work camps are valuable services to organizations and the community around them. They're a benefit to the government in many, many ways because they provide free labour in regard to, for example, forestry cleanup and things like that. It's something that we are looking at. I am aware of the review she's referring to, and we are going to be looking at that exact thing and in fact a whole correctional review, not only the work camps.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Can I get a commitment from the Solicitor General, then, that this review will go over the same ground, I guess, and look specifically at the capacity of the correctional camps and the officers having to leave their families for up to six days at a time in order to work on-site at the camps?

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, our correction officers who are in this province are very well trained. They also know, when they take the job on as correctional officers, that there are times when they have to leave their families, and that's part and parcel of the job. I will tell the hon. member that in the correction review that I'm looking at announcing very shortly, we will look at the whole correction system, not only the work camps.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Bill 12, Education Services Settlement Act

MR. MASON: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Learning tabled a copy of a letter to Bishop Frederick Henry which, the minister claimed, contained the true facts about Bill 12. I'll just quote one line from this letter.

When the teachers' strike had kept students out of class for almost three weeks in many parts of the province, and no agreement was in sight, the government took legislative steps to get classes going again.

How can the minister claim in his letter to the bishop that Bill 12 was a legislative step to get classes going again when in fact students were already back in class well before Bill 12 was ever introduced in this Assembly?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the students went back to class when the PET was declared, an emergency situation was declared. Bill 12 was brought in when the PET was challenged in the court by the ATA, so one definitely led to the other.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, the minister is sliding the definition of legislative, to be sure. So I will ask again: why did the minister include erroneous information in his letter to Bishop Henry that falsely stated that Bill 12 was needed to get classes going again when in fact students were already back in class before Bill 12 was even introduced?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member just called me a liar. That's something that I do not like, and the hon. member is absolutely wrong.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, how is it that when the Minister of Learning pens a letter on Bill 12, he's stating the facts, whereas when Bishop Henry pens a letter, he's putting out misinformation. When did the Ministry of Learning become the ministry of truth?

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

Alberta Supernet

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lately we have been hearing some very disturbing information, that the Alberta Supernet is using technology that's already out of date. This information has made many of my constituents very nervous. My question is to the hon. Minister of Innovation and Science. Can the minister assure Albertans that their tax dollars are being put to good use to build a network that is up to date? [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister has the floor.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While so many questions that we deal with on a day-to-day basis are concerned with the tyranny of the immediate, this question has to do with the future, and Supernet is about the future. It's an optical state-of-the-art network, and because it's an optical network, it's also scalable, which means that it can accommodate an increased demand for bandwidth well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to note that the operations of Supernet are based on a business model, which means that the revenues from the operation of Supernet will be used to refresh the network; in other words, to maintain and upgrade the electronics over the length of that 10-year contract.

Mr. Speaker, I can think of no better expenditure of lottery funds into 4,700 locations in 422 communities across Alberta.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: could the minister inform the House if there are any facilities in Alberta rejecting Supernet in favour of cable or DSL services?

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, there are many schools and

libraries which currently operate on different levels of services. Some would have what we know as a dial-up service, which is about 56K. If you wish to download a picture at that level of service, you can go out, have a cup of coffee and a snack, come back, and your picture might be there. At a DSL level you can't do that because the speed is higher, the bandwidth is greater. What Supernet will do is increase that speed and capacity by probably another 10 to 20 times on top of that and now allow you to take high-resolution X rays or MRIs and transfer them to a remote location, so you have that high-resolution image and you can analyze that at a remote location. You cannot do that under the current system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: could the minister advise Albertans as to what Supernet will do to benefit the existing networks in Alberta like the Alberta public library electronic network?

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, libraries are a very important component to the Supernet because libraries are where every Albertan can have access to the Internet, to this kind of service. It's a community portal, much like our schools are. We are currently testing segment 7. There are libraries, I believe, in Eckville, Rocky Mountain House, and Sylvan Lake to test this service out. This will enhance the current APLEN, which is the Alberta public libraries electronic network. It will give them more capacity and enable them to do more things.

Also, Mr. Speaker, they're currently paying from about \$50 to about \$3,000 a month based on anything from the dial-up service to the high-speed networks. In our model we expect those costs to be ranging from approximately \$242 per month to \$800 per month. We are working with the Minister of Community Development on these plans and look forward to exciting things at our public libraries.

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

Electricity and Natural Gas Billing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta consumers are confused and frustrated with their monthly electricity bills. My first question this afternoon is to the Minister of Government Services. In regard to utility bills, where in one part of the province there are eight line items to comprise the bill and in another part of the province there are 13 items to comprise the bill, what measures is Government Services taking to protect Alberta consumers in regard to deferral accounts with electricity?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true that Government Services does look at consumer protection on the electricity side for the marketing of electricity in the province of Alberta for consumers. For actual consumer protection in terms of what the companies do with their bills, that is under the Department of Energy, and the question might well be referred to the Department of Energy.

However, let me say this. Government Services puts together a package of consumer tip sheets that consumers can call upon to make sure that the people who are out selling electricity are valid, that they have proper contracts in place, and that they identify themselves at the doors to make sure that people have the exact companies they would like to sign a contract with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is Alberta Government Services contemplating having a uniform system of billing for natural gas and electricity so Alberta consumers can accurately compare and understand different charges by different retailers?

MR. COUTTS: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, on the actual company side those particular details should be brought before the EUB and, of course, the Department of Energy. In terms of what Government Services is looking at, we make sure, no matter whether it's a utility company that's serving gas or a utility company that's serving electricity, that the people that are going out and asking consumers to buy their product must be licensed. They must post a \$1 million security bond. They also must be under a code of conduct for their particular marketing, they must show identification to their consumers, and they must show a contract that shows all of the intricacies of the product that they're selling. So that's the protection that we provide for consumers in this province when it comes to electricity marketers and gas marketers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: what rules and regulations are available governing exit fees for electricity consumers switching from a regulated rate option to a competitive offer from another retailer? What regulations do you have for the exit fees?

Thank you.

MR. COUTTS: Government Services, Mr. Speaker, has developed electricity marketing regulations under the Fair Trading Act, and the Fair Trading Act shows those guidelines. When people have concerns about exit fees as well as hooking up with another company, they can call our call centre in Government Services and get some information there as to how they should proceed with setting themselves up with a new marketer.

head: Members' Statements

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

Teaching Profession

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Much has been said recently about teachers, about the teaching profession, and about the teaching environment. Much also has been said by the opposition in this Assembly about what they think we as government members think about teachers, about the teaching profession, and about the current teaching environment. If there is anything that frustrates me, it is having someone else tell me what they think I think. So I rise today to put on record what I as the Member for St. Albert think about teachers, about the teaching profession, and about the current teaching environment.

I know that teachers are truly remarkable citizens. From the beginning of their day to the end they work to enhance the knowledge for which the students have come to school. They care for the health and safety of their students in the gymnasium and on the school grounds. They nourish such values as caring, honesty, and generosity, and they encourage the power of thinking and the possibility of problem solving. I believe the teaching profession is a truly honourable one. As such, those who choose this vocation prepare themselves broadly and extensively to respond to the ever

expanding, ever evolving curricula. This profession demands and dictates to its members a high standard of responsible behaviour. It is my experience that the professionalism of our Alberta teachers is uppermost in their minds. Their professional behaviour in responsibly fulfilling all their contractual obligations and more is truly admirable and worthy of our respect.

I have always respected the dignified integrity of teachers, and I believe that today's teaching environment is a truly challenging one. Societal expectations run the gamut from a little to a lot. Teachers are often expected to be all things to all students in the minds of almost all people. When students need counseling advice, nursing care, and parenting acceptance, the school environment expands considerably. The teaching and learning environment is complex and intense, and I believe it is also productive and exciting. I applaud the numerous quality initiatives taking place in our classrooms, our music and art rooms, our gymnasiums, and all other venues in which significant learning and teaching takes place.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:30

Mikko Nissinen
Alberta Ballet

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this time to recognize Alberta Ballet's outgoing artistic director, Mikko Nissinen. Since 1998 Mikko Nissinen has been at the helm of Canada's fourth largest dance company. During his tenure the company has increased in stature to become one of Canada's leading dance companies. As well, Alberta has gained a great reputation through its performances internationally.

Currently the company is concluding its regular performance season to great acclaim of audiences and critics alike. Deirdre Kelly from the *Globe and Mail* wrote:

The second coming of Alberta Ballet is mostly thanks to Mikko Nissinen, the acclaimed Finnish dancer . . . Alberta Ballet no longer moves, it crackles with energy. The pace is fast and punchy. The dancers attack the choreography . . . with a ferocity that is exhilarating to watch.

Mr. Nissinen has had some exceptional works created for Alberta Ballet and has acquired existing quality repertoires. Some of the great names in the dance world's work, such as George Ballanchine, have graced the stages of Alberta. Mr. Nissinen, realizing the importance of developing local talent, created a platform for young Canadian Alberta choreographers. Through various opportunities in choreographic workshops Alberta Ballet dancer Sabrina Matthews has emerged as a true talent. The Alberta Ballet School has also benefited from Mikko Nissinen due in great part to the appointment of Murray and Nancy Kilgour, teachers of distinction world-wide. Mikko Nissinen has created a dance company for all Albertans to be proud of.

Recently the *Globe and Mail* wrote on the growth of Alberta. One of the people interviewed in the article said that the reasons he moved his family to Alberta was not just for the economic benefits but also the fact that Alberta had great leisure activities and a world-class ballet company. Alberta Ballet is an important part of the cultural fabric of Alberta, that makes this province a very special place to reside.

Please join me in thanking and congratulating Mikko Nissinen on his success in making Alberta Ballet the successful dance company it is today. Mikko, we wish you great success in your new role as artistic director of the Boston Ballet.

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

Safe and Caring Schools Program

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 20 we will remember the students who died at Columbine high school in the United States. In Alberta we will also remember Jason Lang, the 17-year-old Taber high school student killed in the same month. These deaths gave a new sense of urgency to the work of the Alberta Teachers' Association's Safe and Caring Schools project. The goal of that project is "to encourage school practices that model and reinforce socially responsible and respectful behaviors, so that learning and teaching can take place in a safe and caring environment."

The importance of the project aimed at violence prevention and begun in 1996 can be seen in the project partners: our universities; the Muttart Foundation; the Lions Clubs of Alberta; the human rights, citizenship and multiculturalism education fund; the national strategy on community safety and crime prevention; and the Alberta Teachers' Association. Provincial support and funding of the project has been crucial. Research into the nature of violence, the development of preventive programs and materials, and ongoing training of school and community personnel are all products of the project.

Given that the prevention of school violence is literally a matter of life and death, it is hard to understand how the Alberta government could fail to include the resources for the Safe and Caring Schools project in this year's budget. Millions of dollars have been appropriately put into the Jason Lang scholarships so that Jason and what happened to him will never be forgotten. Surely the dollars needed to make sure his story is never repeated are equally valuable. I urge the government to act quickly to restore the funding and ensure that the Safe and Caring Schools project continues uninterrupted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Alberta Juno Award Winners

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has some of the most talented and creative people in the country who are a shining example of our province's vibrant arts and culture scene. Solid evidence of this fact unfolded this past weekend when a number of Alberta artists won several of Canada's top music awards, the Juno, held in St. John's, Newfoundland. Late Sunday night, April 14, my daughter cheered with joy and clapped with glee as the musical group known as Nickelback from the great Alberta town of Three Hills won the best single, best rock album, and best group awards. We are very happy and honoured to congratulate Chad and Mike Kroeger, Ryan Peake, and Ryan Vekedal, who are members of the Nickelback group. Also presented with awards were Albertans Jann Arden for best song writer, Carolyn Dawn Johnson for best country artist, and Oscar Lopez for best instrumental album.

Mr. Speaker, they are all exceptional performers who have continually demonstrated remarkable skill and talent as musicians while bringing pride and honour to Alberta. They inspire others through their music and serve as exceptional role models for up-and-coming Albertan and Canadian musicians. The arts remain a vital part of what makes Alberta one of the most vibrant and exciting places to live in the world. All members of this Assembly recognize the exciting talent that is born and raised in this great province, inspired by our majestic mountains, emerald lakes, blue skies, loving families, and friendly people. Congratulations to each artist. We wish you continued success.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am presenting a petition signed by 115 residents of Edmonton petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to not delist services, raise health care premiums, introduce user fees or further privatize health care."

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table with the Assembly today the 2001 annual report of the Alberta Association of Architects.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings today. The first is letters from Dennis Knelsen of Sherwood Park, Don Iwaschuk of Edson, Marcus Lyon of Okotoks, and Dwayne Papke of Sundre. These Albertans want the government to maintain some access for off-highway vehicles in the Bighorn.

I'm also tabling five copies of a letter from Tamaini Snaith of Calgary, Shirley Bray of Calgary, and Nigel Douglas of Calgary, who want the government to designate the Bighorn wildland recreation area as a wildland park, using the 1986 boundaries.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today, all on the community lottery boards. The first is from Deborah Evans, the Canadian Cancer Society, Alberta/Northwest Territories division, noting that the community lottery boards have supported cancer education and cancer patients and their families with a list of projects.

The second letter is addressed to the Member for Calgary-Currie and is signed by Doug Easterbrook, president, StoryBook Theatre. They thank the member for his kind words and enthusiasm for the project and "continue to hope that there will be a reversal of the decision to disband the Lottery Boards across Alberta."

The next tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Karen Pirie from the Women's Centre continuing to express disappointment in the government's refusal to reinstate the lottery boards. They don't find comfort in the government seeing them fall through the cracks.

The next tabling is from Shauna Kennedy of Emmedia asking whether it wouldn't be easier to reinstate the boards now so that if future funds become available, the structure to distribute the funds will still be in place.

The final letter, Mr. Speaker, is from Danielle French from the constituency of Highwood. She would like to be more informed on the reasoning behind the decision to cancel the community lottery boards.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail sent yesterday afternoon from an Albertan from St. Paul who asked me to table this e-mail on his behalf requesting "Finance Minister Pat Nelson to make an apology in the Legislature to all Catholic Albertans for her derogatory

comments," which he found exceedingly offensive and hurtful. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is a petition supporting public and separate school teachers in their ongoing negotiations with the provincial government. This again is organized by Darby Mahon of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

My second tabling this afternoon is a copy of an e-mail from Phillip and Eileen Walker from the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and in this e-mail they are demanding that the Premier receive the resignation of the Minister of Finance.

Thank you.

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

2:40

DR. PANNU: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and table a letter from the president of the Canadian Federation of University Women, Lethbridge club. Diana Williams, the president, writes this letter on behalf of members who place a very high value on quality public education, and she's writing this letter to protest the very undemocratic nature of Bill 12, which unfortunately has now become law.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

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

MR. MASON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling today, and I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a document entitled Message for Deputy Ministers To Share with Their Staff. This document provides government propaganda from the Ministry of Learning to government employees respecting the teachers' labour dispute.

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

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a petition initiated by the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta and signed by 444 Albertans who are petitioning the government to implement changes to the Mental Health Act of Alberta. They would like to "change the criteria for involuntary commitment or Court Ordered Treatment," to be based on "illness or helplessness, not solely on the presence or absence of danger."

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

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with two tablings, one from the chair of the South Calgary High School Steering Committee and the other from Mark Mcmillan, the chair of the South Calgary High School Youth Committee, both expressing their concern for the deferment of the South Calgary high school project and asking for my help and support to remind government that it's still much needed.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I table in the House today five copies of a letter dated April 15, 2002, which I received from the Leader of the Official Opposition, requesting that the second supplemental of the third question asked on April 15, 2002, be withdrawn, as "it was an unacceptable mistake."

Privilege Contempt of the Assembly

THE SPEAKER: Now, we have two matters to deal with, and the first arises out of a purported question of privilege that was raised just several days ago. I am prepared to rule on this purported question of privilege raised by the Official Opposition House Leader and Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. In a nutshell, the hon. member alleges that the government is in contempt of the Assembly for not complying with the terms of section 42 of the Financial Administration Act concerning certain arrangements about the Swan Hills waste treatment plant.

Notice was given by the member last Thursday, April 11, 2002, after the first set of questions by the Leader of the Official Opposition on this subject. As members should know, questions of privilege must be raised at the earliest opportunity. The member followed the procedure in Standing Order 15(5), which provides that a question of privilege may be raised "after the words are uttered or the events occur [giving] rise to the question."

Frankly, the chair cannot see what there was in the responses by the Premier or the Minister of Finance on that day giving rise to a question of privilege as opposed to the previous day, but in light of my ruling it is not of much consequence.

In support of her application that day the hon. Opposition House Leader tabled some material concerning the financial activity surrounding the government's involvement with the plant. She also tabled a page from the book by Marleau and Montpetit, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, concerning contempt.

Yesterday the Minister of Finance provided some information on the plant and disputed the member's interpretation of section 42 of the act, indicating that the section had not been breached. At a minimum, for there to be a prima facie question of privilege, there would have to be some link to the proceedings of the Assembly to demonstrate how a member's rights were interfered with. While there was much attention devoted to the financial arrangements of the plant, there was not much authority cited as to how the complaint would constitute a contempt. The chair will not read the entire section 42 of the Financial Administration Act, but subsection (2) requires that there to be specific authorization by legislation or regulation before entering into a joint venture, a partnership, or giving a loan or purchasing shares. Subsection (3) restricts a member of Executive Council from introducing in the Assembly an appropriation bill or estimates that would involve the Crown's entering into any of the relationships the chair just mentioned without specific authorization.

Clearly, the chair is being asked to give a legal ruling on this matter. It is not a matter of procedure but, rather, a matter of deciding whether the Crown has met its legal obligations. The authorities are quite clear that it is not the chair's role to interpret legislation that does not involve the procedures of the Assembly. *Beauchesne's* paragraph 31(9) states, "The failure of the Government to comply with the law is not a matter for the Speaker, but should be decided by the courts." The chair would also refer members to Joseph Maingot's book *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, the second edition, at page 180. As Speaker Fraser said in the House of Commons on February 5, 1992, at page 6426 of *Debates*, "Speakers do not interpret or enforce matters of statutory law." Of course, there is an exception when the statute refers to the procedures in the Assembly, but that is not the case here. Likewise, it is not the chair's role to rule on the legality of the contents of the estimates in terms of whether they comply with statutory preconditions. That, too, is a question of law.

Accordingly, there is no prima facie question of privilege.

Privilege Accusations against a Member

THE SPEAKER: Now, yesterday, hon. members, in the Assembly notice was given by the hon. Deputy Premier about the desire to proceed with a purported question of privilege, and it arose out of an exchange that occurred in question period with the Leader of the Official Opposition. The Leader of the Official Opposition visited with me later yesterday afternoon and did indicate to me that he would be away from the Assembly today on official business. Section 15(4) of our Standing Orders states:

If the member whose conduct is called into question is not present, the matter shall be deferred to the next day that the member is present unless the Speaker rules that, in the circumstances, the matter may be dealt with in the member's absence.

In much the same way, I guess, that a point of privilege was dealt with that was raised last Thursday and then followed up last Monday, in this case not knowing what the point of privilege is going to be but only surmising that the point of privilege will probably have to do with words that were exchanged in the Assembly yesterday and recognizing that the longer these matters continue outstanding in here, the more difficult they are on the members themselves, should the Deputy Premier rise shortly and ask for permission to proceed with her submission with respect to this point of privilege, it would be my intent to provide authority to do that, recognizing that this matter will not be dealt with today and it will give the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition 24 hours to review the comments and determine what he would like to say. He would be given an opportunity to respond tomorrow afternoon in the Legislative Assembly, and only after hearing all the arguments would a ruling be provided with respect to this matter.

So I am going to sit, and I will invite the hon. Deputy Premier to advise whether or not the hon. Deputy Premier chooses to initiate a statement today or wait until tomorrow.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I gave notice of my intention to rise on a point of privilege, and today I do wish to address that point of privilege. My question of privilege arises from an allegation in the second main question asked yesterday by the Leader of the Official Opposition. The leader alleges that on April 11 in this Assembly I was heard to say or I said, "Most of the Calgary board are pedophiles." Mr. Speaker, for the record, I made no such remark on mike or off mike. The word "pedophiles" was never uttered by me. When the opposition leader posed his question to me, I immediately responded "Absolutely not," and I'll paraphrase and go on: I did not make that statement.

My denial was not good enough for the leader, who, as usual, seemed compelled to stick to his prepared script even when the script was rendered obsolete by my answer. Following my firm and unequivocal denial, the leader went on to ask whether "statements like that reflect policy decisions made by the government." Again I categorically denied making such a statement, but again the leader seemed incapable of acting in any other way than reading the words that had been put in front of him.

2:50

In his second supplemental he had the temerity to ask me to direct you, Mr. Speaker, to release certain audiotapes. You were very quick to set the record straight on the relationship between the Deputy Premier and the Speaker. You were very quick to point out the obvious inappropriateness of the question, and I understand that that matter has been dealt with. However, the Leader of the Opposition has not been so quick to correct himself in regard to what he alleges he heard or they heard or I said. He has not, in my view,

dealt with that issue at all. He has, in my view, been shamefully irresponsible if not dishonourable in not setting the record straight and apologizing.

Mr. Speaker, I have been a member of this Assembly for almost 15 years. In my first address in this House – I believe we call it our maiden speech – I made the following pledge, which I quote from *Hansard* dated April 11, 1988:

Mr. Speaker, I promise to fulfill my term in this Legislature with dignity and to conduct myself in a way which conveys the utmost respect for my honourable colleagues. I pledge to uphold the traditions of this great institution and hope that what we accomplish here in this Assembly may stand as a shining example to our youth. I also hope that through my actions I can honour the memories of both my father and Henry Kroeger.

Over the course of the years since I made that pledge, Mr. Speaker, I have endeavoured to maintain my personal dignity as well as the dignity of this House. In one false, I believe malicious line of questioning the Leader of the Opposition, in my view, has called that dignity into question not only in this Assembly but across Alberta, where his question from yesterday has been widely reported.

I notice in some media reports today that the leader has tried to qualify this remark with the statement that he didn't actually say that I made the comment, only that the Liberals believe I made that comment. Well, frankly, Mr. Speaker, what the Liberals believe is irrelevant. Albertans can only judge these proceedings by what is said, not by what might or might not be believed. What is relevant to this Assembly is what members say, and what the opposition leader said yesterday was hurtful, it was disrespectful, it was unproven, and above all it was wrong.

I endeavoured very carefully to remember what I said in an off-mike comment during the discussion on April 11 regarding Bishop Henry's letter. I have listened to the audio of the proceedings, which are available on the Internet for all members, and I have reviewed the video of the proceedings. I think it is quite clear. For the record here is what I said, and I quote: most of the Catholic boards have settled. End of quote. This remark was directed to the Minister of Learning and was offered as a possible counterpoint to the arguments of Bishop Henry. To reiterate, Mr. Speaker, the word "pedophile" was never uttered by me.

During my years in political life I've worked hard to establish a positive relationship with Alberta Catholics and, indeed, Albertans of all faiths. When I had the pleasure of serving as minister of health, I was honoured with a lifetime membership in the Catholic Health Association of Alberta and their affiliates. That honour was for my work in maintaining the unique principles of the Catholic philosophy of health care during a time of great change in the health system, and the word "integrity," personal integrity of this member, is on that document. Though I left the health portfolio almost six years ago, that tribute continues to mean a great deal to me and my family.

Speaking of my family, I should put on the record that many members of my family are of the Catholic faith as well as a great number of my very, very close friends. I have a respect for the history, the principles, and the great community spirit of the Catholic church and would never, ever say anything publicly or privately to demean the church, its clergy, or its members.

I believe that the leader's allegation yesterday could potentially blemish that good relation I have with the Catholic church, Mr. Speaker, and even if the leader shows enough respect for this Assembly to apologize, his malicious remark will linger in the public memory. People will wonder: what did the minister actually say? A seed of doubt has been planted, and it has absolutely no merit.

Mr. Speaker, in recent years, in my view, the Liberal opposition has frequently resorted to personal slurs and attacks against members

of this government both inside the House and outside. I don't think it's any coincidence that during this period of personal attacks they have diminished from being a party of stature across this province under the leadership of the late Laurence Decore to a party with only a small handful of seats and virtual irrelevance in most of the province. While I certainly do not profess to be an expert in Liberal political strategy, I do suggest, if I may be so bold, that if they want to regain even a shred of the respect they enjoyed several years ago, they begin today by apologizing for the unfair and untrue allegation leveled at me yesterday, first, and then they might think about focusing on the issues that matter to Albertans rather than trying to score cheap political points by leveling personal attacks on other members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, section 15(1) of the Standing Orders of this Assembly states: "A breach of the rights of the Assembly or of the parliamentary rights of any member constitutes a question of privilege." There is an accusation on the floor of this Assembly from the Leader of the Opposition which clearly, I believe, breaches my rights as a member of this Assembly. How can I possibly continue to execute to the best of my abilities my responsibilities as an MLA, as a minister, as the Deputy Premier with this outrageous falsehood hanging like a black cloud over my character?

Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms, 6th edition, section 69 says that a question of privilege exists if an attack on a member "impinges upon the ability of Members of Parliament to do their job properly." *Beauchesne's* section 64 states that the attacks on individual members in the past eventually resulted in the accuser being "summoned to the Bar to apologize." Mr. Speaker, I hope that's not needed in this case.

It is my sincere hope that the Leader of the Opposition does the honourable thing and unconditionally apologizes, withdraws the accusation, and admits that what he said and did was wrong. Mr. Speaker, failing that, I believe a prima facie case of privilege exists and would encourage you to hear my argument, judge the case, and allow me the right of the next procedural step to clear my name.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you wanted to participate on this purported point of privilege?

MR. MASON: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Be very specific, please.

MR. MASON: We will be as specific as possible, Mr. Speaker.

Following the question period yesterday and the statement of the hon. Deputy Premier, we went and reviewed the videotape, and we could not ascertain what in fact the minister had actually said, but there was one thing that we find rather troubling, and you may wish to take this into account in your ruling. One of the things that the Deputy Premier did that was quite different from the statement made the other day by the hon. Minister of Finance was to make a private comment to another member sitting down, and it was picked up on the tape because the mike was open.

We believe that there needs to be a distinction drawn between a statement which is made obviously for all members of the Assembly to hear and a side comment made privately to a colleague that is inadvertently picked up on the microphone. We would hate to think that people would be searching the videotapes and the audiotapes for any side conversations in order to make use of it in the Assembly.

So that point is just offered for your consideration, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After continuing communication on this issue with the Official Opposition and the third party I seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 58(4) to allow this afternoon's consideration of the estimates of the Department of Sustainable Resource Development to go beyond two hours with the vote on these estimates to take place no later than 5:15 this afternoon as per Standing Order 58(5) or sooner if no one wishes to speak.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: We shall call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2002-03**

Sustainable Resource Development

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: As per the Standing Order the first hour is allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member is able to participate.

The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to be here today to talk about Sustainable Resource Development's 2002-2003 budget. I couldn't think of a better day to be here. With all the snow out there, I assume that there are no forest fires going, so it'll give us a lot of time to think carefully and debate the budget.

Before I start, I'd like to introduce some of the staff I have sitting here in the members' gallery. Our deputy minister, Dr. Bob Fessenden, is here; Crystal Damer, executive assistant to the deputy minister; Stewart Churlish, assistant deputy minister of strategic corporate services; Ray Duffy, director of budgets, forecasts, and financial statements; Daphne Cheel, director of policy and planning; Donna Babchishin, of course, director of communications; and Donna Ballard, my executive assistant. They'll be monitoring the discussions very closely, Mr. Chairman, and ensuring that any answers that I cannot give to some of the questions that may be put across the floor to me we will of course do in writing as soon as possible after the discussions.

I'd like to also thank other departments that were involved in the overall planning of our government budgets, because not only do you develop a stand-alone budget yourself and budget estimates, but we co-ordinate that with other ministries. So I'd like to thank other ministries and their staff for their support, and of course I'd also like to thank the opposition members of the House for their support in a lot of areas and co-operation in the development of programs to serve Albertans.

At Sustainable Resource Development our job is to ensure that Albertans benefit from the development of their public lands and renewable resources both now and of course into the future. For instance, there are a number of economic, recreation, cultural, and social activities on our public lands. Our department maintains a balance between activity and conservation. An example of this

balance is certainly seen throughout the recent public consultation we've been doing in the Bighorn area of our province.

We have a variety of programs and services in our ministry, but there are five core businesses: forest protection, forest land and resource management, fish and wildlife management, rangeland management, and land use disposition management. Each of these core businesses comes with their own challenges, of course.

Speaking of challenges, we dealt with extremely dry conditions and numerous forest fires in the past year. Certainly this reality is costly, and it is reflected in our budget. In terms of our gross comparable forecasts last year we spent close to an additional \$100 million in supplementary estimates to deal with the extremely busy fire season we had. For example, the fire at Chisholm alone resulted in over \$30 million in staffing and equipment costs to get this fire under control.

Dealing with natural occurrences such as fire, it is often difficult to know how our budget will be impacted over the fiscal year. The reality is that the forecast projections from this much of the expenditures are based on weather conditions and the type of fire season that occurs throughout the year. However, what I can tell you is that as a ministry we are doing everything we can to promote fire prevention and also be prepared as a department.

3:10

For instance, in order to prepare for the fire season, we have started the season on March 1, basically about one month earlier than the normal time. Another proactive initiative that we are doing this year is in the area of wildfire education. An example of this education is through the FireSmart program for communities and individuals, providing information and tools for communities to develop effective fire solutions. Our expectations for the FireSmart education program are to reduce the fire behaviour potential, to increase our ability to suppress wildfires, and to increase industry's awareness and support.

To accomplish this we will need to implement effective strategies such as establishing barriers to stop the spread of fires, managing sources of fire fuel such as grass and trees close to communities, managing partnerships in needed prevention programs, enhancing the resources that communities have to fight fires, and enhancing education in communities between all partners, including industry. This is such an important initiative. Prevention measures can save or significantly reduce the impact of fire on families, homes, and communities. We all share in this responsibility for protecting our homes and communities.

Forest protection meets the government business plan goals of keeping Alberta a safe place to live as well as encouraging the well-being and self-reliance of aboriginal people in Alberta. I can assure you that we will not compromise public safety and will do this by supporting programs such as FireSmart and our work with the municipalities.

Another challenge for our ministry is the expanded role of the Natural Resources Conservation Board, also known as the NRCB. On January 1 the independent agency assumed the responsibility for the regulation of confined feeding operations in the province of Alberta. Albertans can be assured that the new review process will be impartial and open, allowing for public input into projects. They will base their judgments on the need for consistent, science-based decisions and on Albertans' desire for sustainable development of our natural resources and our livestock industry, which is so important in Alberta.

With this expanded role and responsibility we will be providing more resources to this area. Specifically, we will be providing an additional million dollars in funding for the NRCB. However,

despite this increase our overall budget is \$7 million less than last fiscal year's budget. Four million dollars of this change is associated with the end of a short-term program related to fire reclamation work from the 1998 fires. We are reducing another \$4 million by finding efficiencies toward the reorganization which we are going through at this time. This reorganization will place a greater focus on regional services and issues as well as make our regions more economical and effective. Streamlining processes and administrative savings will be achieved through the hard work of our dedicated staff. So just to clarify, between the reduction in this area and the increase of \$1 million funding to the NRCB, we will still be facing a \$7 million cut from last year's budget.

Another area that I wish to speak about as a challenge within our ministry is the area of fisheries and reinvestment. Our fisheries resources are under increasing pressure from our growing population and new resource developments. Alberta has the third highest freshwater angling pressure in Canada as well as pressures from aboriginal and domestic fishermen and commercial fisheries. With current fiscal resources these programs are challenging. Our ability to effectively manage fish stocks is a real challenge.

We are currently working out a number of options that will recover healthy fish populations and produce sustainable fisheries in Alberta. These options include rebuilding the population and number of fish types, improving the fisheries inventory to provide current information about the status of the resource, reducing the number of commercial fishermen in Alberta, and providing information and educating the public about fisheries management. These are just a few of the options that we are looking at over the next while. We need to be proactive and get moving on this by taking the necessary steps to help recover this vital resource in Alberta and, by doing so, ensure that Albertans will have the opportunity to enjoy the province's natural, historical, and cultural resources.

Our ministry deals with a number of wildlife situations, both positive and negative. As an individual living in a rural community, I am very aware of the challenges that exist out there. Lately there has been an increase in the number of elk and deer in certain areas of the province. As you can imagine, this causes a variety of problems both on roads and around our farms. In fact, in the last year we have had close to 6,000 wildlife/motor vehicle accidents across the province, a very high number. That's a 40 percent increase in the last seven years. Our department works to establish targets for deer population. We also monitor deer population through a number of ways, including aerial surveys, hunter harvest, and hunter and public input.

Our current deer management strategy is being updated to deal with public concerns. Our new strategy will target problem areas and changing trends. A large part of this strategy is the public education we do through our fish and wildlife officers and through media releases such as the one we will be doing today, and we did one earlier also. Other tools in our strategy include promoting an increase in the number of informed hunters and increasing the number of tags to hunt certain deer in certain areas of Alberta.

The last area that I want to talk about today is that of our forest industry. Forestry is essential to Alberta's sustainable resource development and a very important part of our provincial economy. Part of the overall economic action plan in Alberta includes the forestry sector as the third industry in relation to revenue generation and job creation. In fact, the revenue generation from the forestry sector is around \$8 billion. Over 50,000 people are employed directly and indirectly in the forest industry, and over 45 communities throughout Alberta depend on forestry as their major source of revenue and job creation.

Of course, what is in the news these days is the softwood lumber

trade dispute. There is no doubt that the softwood lumber dispute with the U.S. is having an impact on forestry throughout Canada. It also is very important to those communities who rely on this industry and to thousands of Albertans who work directly and indirectly in this sector. I can assure you that this government will do whatever we can to ensure that we come to a reasonable settlement. Both the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development and my hon. colleague Minister Jonson from International and Intergovernmental Relations have been very involved in this issue. In return for the significant adjustments to our forestry policies and practices, we expect long-term, secure access to the U.S. markets. Like many of you, I am greatly disappointed with the U.S. response to Canada's offer and the 29 percent ruling on March 22. We are not looking for a deal at any cost, though, to our industry. Alberta mills' exports of softwood lumber to the U.S. account for 7 percent of Canada's total softwood exports, or about \$500 million to \$600 million.

3:20

What we need is a solid commitment from the U.S. that current trade cases will end and that new trade cases will not be initiated. International and Intergovernmental Relations is the lead on these issues. Alberta is not looking for its own agreement with the U.S. The U.S. government cannot sign a trade agreement with a province. However, we will have our mark on an agreement. In discussions with the U.S. an Alberta annex would be negotiated by Alberta officials, not federal officials. Alberta does not – does not – subsidize its lumber industry, and Albertans receive a fair market value for their forest resource. I can assure you that Alberta will continue to work closely with our industry partners, the federal government, and other provincial governments to work towards a durable Canadian solution. If we cannot come to a negotiated settlement with the U.S., we will continue to pursue the legal challenges through the World Trade Organization and NAFTA. I am confident that we would win again, like we have the past three times.

Regardless of the outcome of the softwood dispute, our ministry is working with other government departments and industry on the important future direction of our forestry here in Alberta. These include such areas as forest productivity, primary manufacturing, secondary manufacturing, third-level manufacturing, community partnerships and participation, and forest industry supply. In order to remain competitive in the international marketplace, we know that Alberta's forest industry is going to have to diversify. It is important that the industry develop and market and promote the value-added sector. By doing this, we can create different economic opportunities for Albertans while continuing to ensure sustainability of our forests. Industry is such an important player in that process. Whether it is about stumpage, softwood lumber, or timber allocations, we will continue to work with industry to ensure that we have a competitive and sustainable industry. We want an industry that provides stable employment for communities and economic benefit to all Albertans.

Our department realizes that there are many challenges to be faced, but thanks to our careful planning and the dedication of our staff and other departments' staff, we are prepared to meet these challenges. Ladies and gentlemen, my department trusts that you will offer us your understanding and your support on this budget. Again, I want to thank you for your continued support and co-operation as we move forward with this challenging department, and I'd like to thank the opposition for their input in this.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to be able to participate in the Sustainable Resource Development

estimates this afternoon. First of all, I'd like to thank all the staff who are here and all the staff in the department, many of whom I know quite well and have worked with for a number of years on a variety of issues. I think this is just an excellent example of a government department, directed by a minister, who are working in as full a co-operation with the opposition as could possibly be anticipated, and certainly as the critic for this department I appreciate that level of co-operation. What we see in this department are staff who are very dedicated to their work and are very dedicated to the province as a whole. That certainly shows through in how they carry out their work, and it is a pleasure to work with a department where the minister agrees to have full co-operation and as much disclosure as we could ask for. So while I don't want anyone to get the impression that I always agree with everything the department does or the filters that they use in decision-making, it's been unbelievably pleasant to work with the department and certainly all of their staff members, and I can say that, having worked for many years with the staff under the direction of former ministers.

Now, I have to say that perhaps it's not always as much fun in question period as it has been with former ministers. I was reminded of that today when I was in a meeting with Bob Clark and Glen Clegg, who both talked about how interesting question period could be when the Member for Rocky Mountain House was the Minister of Environment and we used to get into some interesting verbal debates. In fact, Glen Clegg said that that Member for Rocky Mountain House never would agree to go deer hunting with me, and that's true. He never would. Now, I'm a little afraid that this minister would, and I'm not sure I would go.

AN HON. MEMBER: Not when you call him "deer" all the time.

MS CARLSON: Well, that was exactly Glen's interpretation. [interjections] There you go. Well, that's interesting.

We've had some more acrimonious and adversarial and sometimes interesting times in question period in previous years, but we certainly haven't got in previous years the level of co-operation and information that we get now.

I would also like to openly acknowledge that we get briefings on issues from the minister and his staff when issues that they think we might be interested in arise, and those are also very beneficial. The offer has been made for us to bring up issues that we wish to be briefed on, and we haven't taken advantage of that offer so far mostly because of my busy schedule, but I can certainly anticipate doing that in the future. Perhaps when we're out of session, we'll do so.

The minister has stated that we will be getting a briefing soon on fisheries, and I particularly look forward to that because, as the minister and the department know, that has been an area that I've had particular pet peeves with for many years. The minister referred to that issue in his comments, and I appreciate that. We believe that this is an area that has been underrepresented and undervalued by the province for many years, subsequently resulting in the kinds of problems we have in fisheries right now, where we are now starting to look at very serious damage being done to the industry from both a commercial and a recreational perspective, not to mention the environmental impact it has on water quality and the food chain when we have problems with fish stocks in the province. In my personal opinion, we can't spend too much time or energy looking at resolving that problem, and I hope that the long-term strategy in dealing with this particular issue will be based on the collection of science-based research and an integrated strategy that takes into account the cumulative impact of fish stocks in all areas of the province, not just on the economic and recreational sides. I'm sure

that that's where this department is going now. I think that they look like they're on the right track, and we look forward to that.

It's my anticipation this afternoon that we'll have a very friendly exchange. I'll make a few opening comments and include a few opening questions in response to the minister's comments. I hope that he will respond, perhaps generally – that's just fine – and then if they have more detail, that detail could come in writing at some later time. Then after those opening comments, I'm hoping to go to more of a question-and-answer format, because this format has worked well in this House with other departments so far this year, but particularly this format has served me very well in past years when we had this department meet in other rooms and when we had some of the senior staff available for questions and answers. The specific budget items in terms of who gets paid what and how many FTEs there are can always be easily submitted in writing and answered later on. For us, what I like to get out of a department review is a general direction of where the ministry is going and how the minister interprets some of the issues that are outstanding in the community. That's worked well for us in the past in this department, and I'm sure that it will work as well this afternoon.

3:30

In general, my only dollar question off the top is that as usual I'm a little concerned when this department sees continued reductions over the years. This is an area that I like to fight for more money in. We've seen quite significant cuts. I understand the restrictions that the minister is under in terms of coming up with his share of the cuts in this most recent budget, but I don't see this department getting their share of the budget surpluses when those also arise periodically throughout the year. If we take a look at budget forecasts right now, this government so far is headed for about a billion dollar surplus, and I'd put a lobby in for this department to get their share.

There are lots of places where onetime funding could be used. Of course, my preference would be for sustained funding, particularly in the enforcement area and the fish and wildlife area. It's really great to have rules and regulations, but if they haven't got the people out in the field educating and enforcing, then there are some problems, and we've seen some of those problems erupt over time. So that's just my only general observation about cash to begin with.

The minister in his introductory comments talked about a balance between economic development and environment, and I'm glad to see that that's how he sees the department. It isn't specifically how it is outlined when we take a look at the business plan for the year 2002 to '05. There they talk about the mandate including, yes, "the right dynamic balance amongst economic, environmental and social values and benefits," but later on it talks about "integrating scientific, technical, social and political considerations into the decision-making framework for resource management." So I don't see the flow-through of the focus on environment all the way through.

I would also be concerned about and want to know what kind of weighting the ministry gives in their decision-making process, because it seems to me often that the economic and the political considerations get a very heavy weighting compared to the other areas. Maybe I'm wrong in how they do that, but those are certainly the optics, and we would like to be provided perhaps later on some weighting of that. I'll just go on to a couple more, and then you can generally answer that, if you like.

Firefighting: a good job in this province. We had some concerns a couple of years ago that the cuts in staff and the loss of expertise may have contributed to some longer time and therefore extra dollars and lost inventory in some of the fires that occurred about two years ago, but generally speaking, I think this is an area that government does a pretty good job in. We certainly never have any problems

when they come back in supplementary estimates for money if it's a heavy fire year. Happy to see you focus on education. I think in this area it's very needed. I'm not a huge fan of fire suppression in some areas, but I think that generally speaking the government has done a good job on this.

The minister talked about an extra \$50 million for the NRCB, and I didn't get exactly what that money was going to be spent on, so if he could just expand a little bit on that.

Then if he could also expand on two questions on the fishing information he provided. Are you specifically going to be addressing the request from the walleye association to increase fishing licences and have that money directly dedicated to helping sustain fish stocks? That's something that I think is quite interesting that has been brought up, and definitely we would support something like that.

Then he talked about elk and deer, and that brought to mind that I've been hearing quite a few concerns about tick-infected moose and them moving into farmyards and acreages and causing some kinds of problems. Does he see that as a problem in his department, and what are they doing about it?

So just take those few questions, if the minister could respond, and then I'll continue.

MR. CARDINAL: You covered a lot of areas, and I really, really appreciate that giving me an opportunity to continue with some of my remarks. Of course, there are a number of priorities and issues that do overlap in our ministry in terms of importance. You mentioned a bit about priorities and the importance of issues. I mentioned many of these issues in my remarks earlier today, but again I'll just touch on other areas. In terms of priorities perhaps I can speak a bit about them in just a few general categories.

The first one I want to speak to is the priority of protection of Albertans, because the issue of the fire and fire suppression was mentioned. As the member knows, we are responsible for protecting Albertans from forest fires, and we do, I believe, a very good job of this each fire season.

Another area that is involved in the protection of Albertans of course would be dealing with drought on public lands. As you know, it may look very wet out there today with a lot of snow, but we shouldn't be fooled. It is very, very dry out there yet, and we need to be alert.

Another priority you mentioned is achieving a balance again, and, Mr. Chairman, our department will look at achieving a balance in the economic, environment, and social aspects of our resources. This means that we know that we need to find a balance for all competing demands that exist in our province. For instance, the Bighorn area of the province: many people and industry want to use this area for their own distinct purposes. Our challenge of course is to find a balanced and sustainable approach to all these demands for now and for the future, for the long term. One of the key elements of doing this is to involve the public. We need to know what their needs are, and I've mentioned in this House a number of times the committee that's in place and the work that they are doing. I'm expecting a report from them in the near future.

Another resource that of course we need to find a balance in is our fish and wildlife resources, and the hon. member mentioned the importance of that to Alberta and to Alberta's future. We will definitely do that. As I mentioned earlier, Alberta is facing many challenges in keeping our fish population viable. One of the ways our ministry is looking at ensuring this is through improving the Alberta fisheries initiative that I spoke about earlier, and I'll expand on that in a very short while.

The last area I want to talk about in answering your questions on

this is about the sustainability of our forests. We all know that we are currently facing a huge issue with the ongoing softwood lumber trade dispute, which I spoke about in my opening comments. While working in partnership with International and Intergovernmental Relations, we are fighting for Alberta's forest sector. However, this issue is not just about the softwood lumber dispute. There are so many communities and so many Albertans dependent on the forest industry itself, on the primary, the secondary, and the tertiary industries. So we need to have strategies that will ensure the existence of this sector for a very long time, and you can be assured that we will continue to do that.

3:40

When you look at our forest resources, for an example, in relation to the management of our resources, we only harvest approximately 50 percent of what the growth will be out there. There's approximately 44 million cubic metres of annual growth, and we are only taking out 23.1 million cubic metres of annual growth. So we are definitely trying to keep a balance. It's not easy to do, but it's something that we will be doing and will continue to do because it is very important. Conifers, for someone that may be interested – that's spruce and pine – are 13.2 million cubic metres, and deciduous, which is normally aspen or poplar, are about 9.9 million cubic metres. So we do have a good inventory of our forests. We have good forest management agreements in place with the industries. We're partnering with the Alberta Forest Products Association in relation to the future plans of where we go with our forestry.

The primary industry itself I mentioned earlier is again an \$8.4 billion industry. Over 24,000 are directly employed in the primary industry itself. What we need to look at when we're talking about forestry and how important it is to Albertans is that the corporate tax alone is \$188 million. That's only from the primary industry, not the secondary or tertiary. Provincial income tax is \$197 million; property tax is \$114 million; stumpage, \$71.4 million; direct expenditures, \$4 billion; and indirect expenditures, \$6.7 billion. So it's a major, major industry, and no doubt we will continue to be prosperous as long as we can manage the forest fires and the other demands that are out there to use our forest resources.

The other very important area to the member, I believe, and of course to Albertans and to our government is the area of fisheries. In fact, I've been working very closely with the member and our colleagues in government to look at how we may revitalize the sport and commercial fishing industry in Alberta. Today we will be releasing – and the member will have the information today – what we are doing there. Part of that input was already done through our normal approval processes and also in consultation with the member opposite.

One of the challenges we face in the fisheries of course is that the province has the third highest angling pressure in Canada. Alberta's population increased 35 percent since 1980. There are about 300,000 anglers, and there are currently over 800 commercial fisheries active in the province of Alberta. Alberta only has about 1,000 fish-bearing lakes compared to 94,000 in Saskatchewan and 110,000 in Manitoba and 250,000 lakes in Ontario. So definitely we have less lakes and more people. Of Alberta's fishing lakes, 800 support natural fish populations and 300 must be supported by stocking programs.

Fishing licences, for an example, in 2001 were the highest they've ever been since 1997, so the pressure doesn't stop. In 2001, 9,000 more licences were purchased by resident anglers than in the previous year, and there are only about 18 species of fish in Alberta that are preferred for food. So what we need is more detailed knowledge of fishing pressures and the fish resources to ensure that

sport, commercial, and domestic uses are sustainable for the future. Humans share the fisheries resources with many others, including animals, aquatic birds, and cormorants, of course.

Some of the challenges, some of the things we need to do to revitalize the industry are to look at increasing inventory and population monitoring activities to gain greater knowledge of fish populations in specific locations, upgrading fish disease control programs, stepping up efforts to encourage Albertans to protect natural fish habitats, increasing public education and information, improving the province's hatchery system, in operation for more than nine years now, and drastically reducing the number of commercial fishing licence holders through increased fees and a compensation program.

That is one that we are really targeting to make that industry more viable and, at the same time, more manageable. We are looking at reducing the 800 licences possibly down to about 200 and reducing the yardage they have from 34,000 100-yard nets down to about 18,000. What we had to do is provide a compensation package of \$200 per 100-yard net and also \$2,000 per zone for those people that want to step out of that industry. The commercial fishing industry is about a \$5 million industry. On the other hand, the sportfishing industry is about \$300 million, so there is quite a difference there.

What is happening in some of those areas, because there are so many commercial fisherman, so few resources, and so few lakes, is that when the lake opens, the targeted population is never really harvested, because what comes out first is the population that's not targeted, which is normally the walleye and other sport species. So what we will do with this new plan is we will ensure that we reduce the number of commercial fishermen so they are manageable and so they become more economically viable, but it is going to be a challenge. I'll definitely need support from our government, from the public out there, and from the opposition, of course, to ensure that we move very carefully, ensuring that as we move forward with the compensation package, we do not really have a negative impact on the economies of some of the smaller fishermen.

What I intend to do once the package is released, possibly later today or tomorrow, is also ensure that we have a hardship committee put in place, which will include someone from the Alberta Commercial Fishermen's Association and our department and possibly some other department member. That will look at those commercial fisheries that may have to sell their smaller licence holdings, but, at the same time, it could be part of their total family income. I'm willing to look at each individual case to ensure that we do not create a hardship for that particular industry. What we want to do with that industry is enhance it so it's economically viable while we have a system in place that will be better managed.

In the other area what we're doing is enhancing fish spawning through lake closures and other methods and introducing pilot projects. We have a pilot project that will be announced either today or tomorrow, and it's in my home community. Calling Lake is where I'm from. What that community has agreed to do is to look at a very innovative project there. That lake at one time had an abundance of fish: whitefish, tullibee, walleye, and pike. Through, of course, various pressures and I guess sometimes not taking the appropriate actions at the appropriate time to look at the natural spawning grounds, that lake had come to a near collapse situation as far as the walleye fisheries, and it was closed, whereas it was catch and release.

What we are doing with that lake now is that we are changing the policies. As of May 15 you'll be able to keep one walleye, any size, and two jackfish, any size, and the fishermen will decide what fish is suitable for their family, but while we're doing that, we're also closing one-third of the north part of that lake, which is a natural

spawning grounds, a natural nesting grounds, and that will become a sanctuary where we will not allow any fishing whatsoever. While we're doing that, we also will be opening up the beaver dams that have plugged up the natural spawning grounds, and there are two major natural spawning grounds, one river and one creek, that have been blocked for years now by beaver dams and other activities.

3:50

So it's an innovative approach, and I think it's something that Albertans could possibly look at supporting across Alberta. I'm not sure if it's ever been done in Alberta or any other jurisdiction in Canada, but I think it's a unique concept of not depending solely on fish hatcheries and moving fish stocks around but enhancing the natural spawning grounds where they should be. I think it's a process that could work. It's something that's supported by the community, and the public I think will support it. I'll also definitely need the support of the opposition in this process.

The other area that you mentioned. I'll try and answer some of these. An example is the increased funding in NRCB. Of course, as of January 1 of this year I have assumed responsibility of NRCB. With new staff and new responsibilities we will be requiring, no doubt, additional dollars. The NRCB, as you are aware, is the Natural Resources Conservation Board. What it does, for those members that may not know, is review applications for approval of major natural resource development projects such as forestry, recreation and tourism, the mining industry, and water management. This board decides on a number of issues, and I can expand on that a bit later if you want, but that is where the million dollars is going, to the expanded role of NRCB and the new staffing and the new structure and the new responsibility. It is a good process. It's something that the public I think would support and no doubt the opposition also.

As far as the department reorganization, one the questions you have is the cuts in staff, especially in the area of conservation officers. We are reorganizing the department, and the opposition member, of course, has been somewhat involved in the process. What we are doing is we are making four regions out there, and actually an executive regional director will be situated in Lac La Biche for the northeast region. Other ones will be situated in Peace River for the northwest region and Rocky Mountain House for the central region and Calgary for the south region. Those are the four executive directors, and these executive directors actually report directly to the deputy minister, so their role is an authority. As far as review of projects or approval of projects, it will be done out in the field. Right now the way the process works – normally if you go apply for, as an example, a timber permit or a gravel permit, you apply at the local level. It goes up to the assistant deputy minister, across to, if it's environment, Environment, fish and wildlife, and then back down, then back up, and then back down. What will happen with this new process is that if an individual goes and applies for a permit, for example, to develop a gravel pit, they should be able to get the approval right at the regional office. It's the one-window approach that the industry has been asking for, so it makes the department more efficient.

I'll sit for now, and maybe you have a few other questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciated the exchange here and the discussion and the information. I'll admit to having missed some of the questions that were raised by my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie, and if there is some repetition in our questions, I apologize for that. There are times when we all have constituents

who want issues raised, and sometimes that leads to duplication. You've also, I recognize, provided some answers that addressed a few of the questions that I had around fish stock management, lake management, restoration of, for example, Calling Lake, which will be interesting to watch, and I hope it succeeds. That's a beautiful lake. I've camped on the shores of Calling Lake and watched the pelicans and the herons fish, although I haven't been up there now in probably five years. It's a beautiful lake, and I hope we're able to restore it to robust health. So certainly that's an innovation we'll be watching closely and wish you the best of luck with.

You may well already have addressed questions about some of the shifts in the overall budget. As I'm looking at it, there seems to be a decrease in the operating expenses and capital investment of around 3 percent, I think. Capital, on the other hand, is going up. Some of us will be interested to know what's driving that and hear your explanations for that. The huge overrun in last year's budget, I believe, was – am I right in assuming that's primarily because of forest expenditures? Yeah.

Also, we've noticed that the number of full-time equivalent employees is dropping for the department. Of course, by taking on responsibility, as you noted, for the NRCB, you're gaining staff, I guess, through that process. But there are changes in staff there, and if you haven't already explained them, it would be useful to understand for us and for the public.

I'm just going to work through some of my notes and then go to the business plans. The question of regional offices for various government departments comes up. I know they've recently been an issue and a concern in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. They are recognized as an important way for many different ministries, including this one, Sustainable Resource Development, to reach out across the province and to implement its programs across the province. There is a budget item, if I'm reading this correctly, of about \$1.8 million to set up new regional offices. One of the questions around regional offices is: what facility do they use? Do they move into existing facilities? Are they looking at new leases in private buildings? There was a day even when the offices might have been installed in buildings that were purpose built by the government. I doubt if that's happening now, but it may be. And \$1.8 million dollars is a fair bit of money; it would be useful to know if that's going to existing buildings or new buildings or new leases and how that's being handled. I'm not sure what the relationship is in this sort of exercise between the Department of Sustainable Resource Development and the Department of Infrastructure. I don't know if Infrastructure's involved in this process or not.

4:00

Also, if there are new offices, there will be new expenses going along with the space. Will there be, for example, departmental identity logos, new logos or new vehicles and so on? Details on that sort of expense within reason are useful. It's, frankly, a way to just keep everybody on their toes.

Shifting to the question of legal services; it may be in here somewhere. Last year there was \$67,000 for legal services, and we haven't been able to find it in the current proposed budget. So I suppose a simple question would be: where did the legal services go? Maybe we don't need any this year, which would be a fine thing, but I think it's probably reasonable that any department of this size and this nature requires legal services legitimately, yet we can't see them in the budget. So the explanation for that would be useful.

One of the strengths of this government, I think, is communications, and I notice that the communications budget is increasing by a fair percent, going up from \$719,000 to \$804,000, so that's more than a 10 percent increase. That may be for community education

purposes. It may be for press releases. It may be for photo ops. It may be for all kinds of things. The questions would be: why a 10 percent or 11 percent increase in that budget, and what's it being used for? Preferably for things like community education, but it may have other purposes as well.

There's also a substantial increase in the budget for policy and planning, going up, if the figures are correct, almost 160 percent, so a very substantial increase. We like to think that maybe it's because some of our very good ideas that we've offered to the department are going to be acted on, so you're committing policy and planning dollars to some of our ideas. But in case that isn't the situation, what are those dollars going to be spent on? What policy and planning work is coming along that requires more than a doubling of expenditures in that area? Along with that, are we going to be seeing an increase in staff? The overall staff in the department isn't increasing, so who's going to be using that money? Is it going to be consultants? If so, how would those consultants be hired and retained? What's the process for selecting consultants? How are we sure that we get the best people for the job, whether they're staff or consultants or whoever?

We move on to program 2, forest protection. Again, it may be that my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie has raised some of these questions, but I would like to ensure that they are covered. It looks like the budget for fire reclamation has been eliminated, I think. That's how it appears anyway. What's going on there? That's a fair chunk of money actually. I think it's close to \$4 million, if I'm reading this correctly, and that's a lot of money. Last year we had a very serious fire season, so the question would be: are we not doing any fire reclamation work? If we are, is it being handled elsewhere? What's going on there?

There are also some signs of programs perhaps being cut under line 2.0.4, forest fire information and community programs. Certainly, again referring to last year, there was a lot of controversy over communities getting notified about fires, communities being involved with fire prevention, and then evacuation and so on. So that's probably being handled somewhere else; I'm not sure where, though. I have a feeling there will be a reasonable explanation there. It may involve reducing or eliminating one program and starting a new program, but the details of that would be helpful for us.

If we move to program 3, forest land and resource management, it's a sizable piece of the department, ranging in the last couple of years between \$28 million and \$33 million. So it's a significant amount of money, but we are seeing a bit of a drop in the forest policy area, from \$336,000 to \$283,000. Does that mean we're going to be seeing less policy come out of the department? How does that fit with the very substantial increase under another program in policy and planning, or does it relate at all? Why are we seeing that drop there? We're seeing also a cut in capital investment for this area from \$161,000 last year to \$35,000 this year. So it makes you wonder what kind of investment the department is doing for \$35,000. It's a modest amount of capital investment. I'm curious to know what it's for.

The eastern slopes is one of the areas of this province truly prized by Albertans and by people who visit here. We do in fact get many people who visit here and use outfitters to go into the eastern slopes and explore or hunt or fish. Last summer the department was planning three pilot projects related to the tenure system for outfitters on the eastern slopes. What's the status of these pilot projects? Every pilot is supposed to run a course and then be evaluated and either expanded or eliminated. If we started those pilots last summer, will they be in full swing this year? Are they already being phased out or expanded? What's the status of them?

There's also constant concern about the major strategies for the

management of forests. Going through the business plan, one of the major strategies of the department is to "provide a clear, balanced approach to forest management," which sounds great. Of course we always want balance, and we want things to be clear. So could the minister please provide copies of that sort of strategy and indeed of any forest inventories that the province has done in the last few years so that the public can be clear on how effectively the forest management process is proceeding. What's the status of our inventories? Are they in fact sustainable? We would certainly hope they are, given the title of this department, but there is concern that the demands on the forests of Alberta are beyond the abilities of the forests to meet, so our forests may not be sustainable. Good, clear information on an inventory of forests would be invaluable to all Albertans.

4:10

We're concerned that there may not be any more forests to allocate to new mills, and the mills that are there now may not be operating at capacity because the inventory isn't adequate. So that raises the question: if the government has allowed the mills to overbuild and the industry to overbuild, where are we going to go in the future? What's going to happen? What's going to happen to our industry? How will mills that have to chronically function at less than capacity continue to be economically feasible? If we're close to the annual allowable limit for cut to meet the needs of the mills, what's going to happen in the future? Are we constantly pushing the limits? What's the calculation based on? Is it based on real, solid research on what the forest can provide, or is it based on some hope of what the mill will demand? Is there a risk that perhaps mills themselves have created an impression or have been given an impression that inventories are greater than what they really are? Those are all concerns.

Given the importance of the forests in Alberta and the importance of this industry, I'm not sure that it's adequate in the business plans to just encourage sustainable forest management. Why aren't we requiring it in the business plans? Why don't we say that sustainable forest management will be required? The strategy actually uses the word "encourage" rather than "require." Certainly it's nice to encourage things, but when it comes to the forests of Alberta and the thousands of jobs and the environmental concerns, maybe we should be requiring proper forest management.

There's also in strategy 2.4 some pretty creative language used to create impressions but maybe not explain in detail what's going on. So when we talk, for example, about the department "unleashing innovation," what exactly are we talking about there? What's the innovation? How are we unleashing it? What does it really mean? We could unleash innovation of all sorts. What kind of innovation are we looking for? I mean, are we unleashing it because it's currently tied up in the forest somewhere, or are we unleashing it for some other reason? So more detail, more specifics in the business plan would be much appreciated.

That carries me through some of the programs, and I see my time is just about out here, so I will take my seat. You can respond, and I'm sure there'll be other questions. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much. Those are good questions and I'll answer some, but I'll allow the staff to answer in writing some of the more detailed stuff.

The issue of budget decreases. I mentioned, I believe, some of that in my opening comments, that \$4 million of the \$8 million decrease in the budget was because we finished a project from the

1998 fire, and that took \$4 million. That is why we don't need that money any longer. The other \$4 million, of course, we will be finding through the reorganization of our department.

As far as full-time equivalents or full-time staff being dropped, the drops are only minor. What we're doing is basically looking at reallocating some of the existing resources we have. For an example, we're putting four new regional offices out there with more responsibility, more approval authority at the local level, and more visibility, with the ability for the public to be able to phone one office if they have a concern on fisheries, if they have a concern on public lands, if they have a concern on forestry or other areas of our departmental responsibility. Those regional offices – one in Lac La Biche, one in Peace River, one in Rocky Mountain House, and one in Calgary – will be able to address those issues. Those new positions were actually filled using existing full-time equivalent positions and reallocating existing staff within the department.

So what we've done is become way more efficient in serving the public and the MLAs out there, who get a lot of phone calls at times, because, as all of you know, if a department is not efficient and the public does not know who to contact when they have an issue, they end up calling the MLA's office. What this will do is that the public will know the person in charge of all the areas they're in charge of, and that person will be highly visible. It's a person that's local. They've been there, in most cases, a long time and know the people, know the region, and it should be very effective. We will not require new office space for our northern offices, our existing offices. Of course, there are vehicles there already, the office is there, the telephones are all connected, and they're all set up.

The other area we're working with closely in relation to office space, of course, is Infrastructure. Because of some changes that are taking place in Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, there are some vacant office spaces where we are collocated, for an example in Athabasca, where we will expand our office by moving staff in the existing offices. So there will be no added cost or a very minimum cost in relation to office space.

The \$67,000 in legal services. I'll get my department to answer that in writing, because I'm not really sure.

The increase in the communications budget. Of course, we're trying to be more proactive and ensure that the public knows the types of things we are doing in the department, and this is an example. This booklet shows almost everything you need to know about the forest industry in Alberta, including the inventory, the annual allowable cut, and the annual allowable growth. This project even breaks down areas, like Edmonton for an example, as to what impact forestry has. I think it's important for people in Alberta to know. For an example, in Edmonton in the primary industry in forestry there are 10,536 people employed. It's a \$1.1 billion industry. They're into value-adding mainly, and all those are here in Edmonton. That's just one example of many examples in Grande Prairie, the Peace River region, the Slave Lake region, and then it goes on to show the forest management agreements. It shows where all the sawmill and pulp mill projects are there. It's important, I think, to have proper communications for the public to ensure that they are very clear on what the forestry department does. This is another example of, I think, good communication. There's a little pamphlet that goes with this also that will show the innovative projects of sustaining the fisheries industry, both the sportfishing industry and also the commercial fishing industry in Alberta.

4:20

In relation to the communications budget, I think that this year, being a new department and new structuring, no doubt the communications budget that we require will increase. I offered to use smoke

signals in my department, but no one could read them, so I couldn't use those to save money. If there's an increase in this budget: again, if I missed something on communications, I'll get my department to answer that in writing, not smoke signals.

The other one is the FireSmart program, that we just announced. It's a major communications package involving most of the municipalities, involving firemen out there and communities and municipalities to start looking at how we can fireproof our communities by developing fire preventative programs around the communities, looking at the area structure plan, for an example. There are a number of ways to do that. In Wabasca, which is a community in my constituency, and also in Fort McMurray, in fact, we are moving some public land to the municipality for more commercial and residential development. What we've asked in that plan, as part of our agreement to move the public land, is to put in their area structure plan a fireguard around a community. So we are doing a lot of innovative things as far as communications.

Policy and planning. I'll ask my department, again, to answer that in writing to you because it's pretty detailed.

In relation to forest land and resource management, again, I'll get my department to expand on that and also on the eastern slopes policy, because it is quite detailed. As far as forest management and the balanced approach, we have a policy in place in Alberta that we will never harvest more than there is annual allowable growth. That is the challenge, because we have fires, we have, you know, the beetles, and we have other interests in development of resources in the same area where we are harvesting forest resources. It's challenging, but it's not impossible to do. We know the capacity of what our mills require both short and long term. We know, generally, what volume we have both short and long term, and we generally know at this time how many resources we have to allocate.

For an example, the GAP project in the Grande Prairie region not moving forward allowed us to look at reallocation of those resources to, possibly, existing companies. We've always said that before calling for new companies to come in to harvest the resources we have, we'd better on the long-term basis stabilize the existing companies we have out there. So it is very important. Our industry, partnering with us, is doing a heck of a job in forest management and balanced growth and balanced approaches in harvesting that resource.

The other area you mentioned that is very, very important, of course, is forest protection. Although it's something we don't have to worry about today because there's so much snow out there, you can be assured that as soon as it warms up, it is still dry out there. As you are aware, last year we spent \$170 million, which was considerably more than what our operating budget is. When you look at the last five years, we've spent \$58 million a year for the last five years. So it is an area where we are definitely being proactive.

We have roughly over 2,000 personnel that are trained in fire fighting, and we have 22 air tankers on contract and 14 air tanker bases. We have 132 lookout sites and 41 ranger stations. We have 152 weather stations, 39 remotes, 13 lightning direction finders, and of course we have our operation budget of about \$69 million for 2002-2003. The secret to fighting fires is basically being prepared, and it is something where we could never do too good a job. Being prepared means having a good policy in place, being ready, and early detection of fires. As soon as there's a fire out there, we need to be out there with early response. For an example, if a fire starts at, say, 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock in the evening, with the new policy we have in place now, our bombers will be out there. If the weather is reasonable, we'll be out there at 4 o'clock in the morning. The previous policy was that they would be out there from 10:30 in the morning till 5 o'clock, so it allowed the fire another six hours to

burn before we were out there. So that's one policy we've changed. That's just an example of some of the changes we are looking at.

As far as that particular budget for fires, the breakdown is: policy and readiness, \$44 million; prevention and detection, \$9.5 million; and early response, \$36 million. So definitely we are ready. What I will do is ask my staff to pass on to you this information that shows you exactly a breakdown of the policy readiness; for an example, the exact dollars of firefighter training, information systems, permanent manpower, seasonal manpower, fire line and aircraft communications. All of it is broken down with the dollars in there. If you go under prevention and detection, it shows you that we are spending \$9.5 million and what we do with that budget. The FireSmart program is under that, with \$3.8 million; fire investigation, legal, \$110,000; then early response again; the rapid attack crew, heli-tack crew, heli-tack support crew; aircraft operations; and wildfire fighting crew contracts. We also have contracts. In addition to that, we have, of course, I believe around 38 contracts, some with First Nations that are ready. If we call them, they're out there working.

In addition to this, we are also looking at a way of providing possible fire insurance for this year. It's going to cost us approximately \$12.5 million. It'll cover insurance between \$175 million and \$300 million, and again we will provide you detailed information on this as to exactly how it's going to work. It's a one-year pilot project, and I think that if the situation is like last year, the last five years, no doubt it's something that can kick in. There are criteria as to when something like that would kick in.

The other area we are working on and jointly done with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is a program between that department and the municipalities, especially the ones – there are about 16 or 18 municipalities – that are bordering the protected area, the green area of Alberta. What we have there is that a lot of the fires start in the municipalities, and the existing programs we have in place sometimes do not encourage the municipalities to call us early to go in and help put out the fires. Because of the billing system we had in the past, the municipalities would wait, try to put out the fire, and eventually they'd call us. Sometimes it's too late. The fire is out of control and gone into the protected area and some Crown lands within the white area.

4:30

So we are looking at a joint agreement where we will set criteria. It's just starting to go into the process now. I think some of the municipalities support it. We will be doing an MR jointly with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and again we will advise you of this process. It is something that is good. What will happen is that if a fire starts in the municipality, the municipality will go in there and try to put it out. If they have a problem, they call us immediately, and we will be out there to assist in putting it out and bring in maybe our mop-up crews, even the standby crews, which we have sitting already in place and in a lot of cases not doing a whole lot. So they will go in there and assist the municipalities in putting out these fires and mopping up the fires. I think it's a system that will work. We are doing everything possible to be proactive in fire suppression.

I believe you had maybe another question. That was in relation to innovation, 2.4. Again, I'll ask my department to expand on that particular one. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise to participate in the debate this afternoon on the estimates for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. There are a number of issues that I certainly would like to bring to the attention

of the hon. minister and his staff. Certainly in the previous remarks by the hon. minister we cannot forget the importance of the lumber industry, the forestry industry, to this province and the efforts that have been made to diversify our province using our forests to achieve this goal. However, there are always questions as to just how many sustainable cubic metres of softwood lumber there are. Some quarters say that it's not sustainable; other individuals say that it certainly is. At this time I would certainly encourage the minister to table in the Assembly to qualify this argument: do we have enough timber supply not only to sustain the current mills and their production rates but also future development, particularly up in the Peace district?

Now, the hon. minister, I believe, said that there were 10,500 jobs directly and indirectly created around metro Edmonton, which is certainly significant to the local economy, and I certainly appreciate that information. The lumber industry in the entire country is valued at over, I believe, \$30 billion, or the American market is a \$30 billion market and we need access to that. Hopefully the minister, in co-operation with the minister of intergovernmental affairs and all officials across the country, is going to be able to resolve this dispute regarding duties to America.

However, I'm concerned about the export of raw logs to Montana. At the same time, Mr. Chairman, the minister is correctly pointing out the significance to the local economy. What sort of difference is the trucking of raw logs to Montana making to our value-added production here in this province, and how much lumber is exported or trucked across the border to Montana? I've said this before in this Assembly, I believe. I was astonished and delighted at the same time on a visit to St. Louis. I was in a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. I walked past a construction site, and there was a lift of two-by-fours that had been manufactured. They were still in their sort of cellophane shrink-wrap, and they came from the constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne. This product had originated in Whitecourt, and I was surprised to see this. I went over and had a bit of inspection of this lift of two-by-fours.

I don't know if that practice will continue, unfortunately, with this ongoing quarrel with our neighbours to the south. To resolve the softwood dispute is quite an issue. Whenever you think of the Americans, they have a coalition dominated by lumber producers in the southern states, where there are privately owned lots. All the trees that are produced are on private property. Yet we have so many Crown leases and Crown allocations in this province. That's the basis of the dispute as I understand it.

Now, many of these private lot owners or landowners in the southern states certainly object to Canada's almost \$10 billion presence in the U.S. market, charging that of course not only Canada but Alberta subsidizes its publicly owned forests and dumps — they're accusing us of dumping — lumber in the United States market. Canada, backed by a World Trade Organization decision in previous softwood lumber disputes, certainly refutes this charge. This country has won World Trade Organization softwood decisions in the past, and basically when we win these arguments, we win the right to retaliate against American exports to Canada, but we're really risking the reverse. We're risking a tariff wall against ourselves. This, unfortunately, increases our costs.

There's no deal here. There's certainly no deal. There are compromises being made. There's talk of an export tax. It's been suggested that it could be as high as 32 percent at the border. I don't know how much of an effect, but I think it's going to have a significant effect on our industry. I understand that there have been efforts made, and I would recognize those efforts. There have been efforts made by this government to protect the smaller operators from the fallout of all this, of what's going to happen.

In order to I guess the word is pacify the Americans on this issue, what sort of policy changes is the department going to have to make in this current fiscal year? Are we looking at changing Alberta's forest act and timber management regulations, the FMAs, to eliminate ministerial discretion? Certainly there is talk that this is what's needed to be done. I don't know how that's going to affect us. How will it affect timber quotas, timber licences or permits? If the minister could shed some light on this, I would be grateful.

Now, there's also the whole issue of regulatory controls. For example, would there be request for proposal options? Would what are called the RFPs have to be eliminated now to satisfy our American cousins? With the complaints from this coalition, who have an extensive lobby in Ottawa from what I can read on this issue, are we going to be forced so that all new tenures, all new blocks that are put up for sale are sold competitively, based solely, regardless of who it is, on the highest price paid? Certainly I can remember the Bow-Crow forest region in southwestern Alberta. The Competition Bureau had to get in there and say: "No. This is wrong. This is not competition." There was actually a case of bid rigging, and one outfit was found guilty. I think it was a \$10,000 fine or something of that nature. Is this the sort of past practice that our American cousins are talking about?

4:40

Now, there is also the issue of stumpage. What adjustments are going to be made to our regulations to update our current system in this fiscal year, Mr. Chairman? I think it's important. Are there going to be annual cost updates by the department? Is there going to be interest on the inventory? Is there going to be an elimination of the small mill rate for the larger operators? This is perhaps what the hon. minister had to do in order to protect what are called the mom-and-pop sawmills, the smaller ones. Is another step in this to enact new legislation to install this validation process? How will this work? The regulated log transaction data requirements by the industry, a regulated requirement for cost updates by third parties: how will this be handled? Will there be unrestricted eligibility in the sale of land based on the highest bid only? Will this be accepted for any and all future sales? These are the commercial timber permits. This is getting back to the unfortunate episode that occurred in the Bow-Crow forest region.

Now, I hope that all these changes are going to certainly occur in this fiscal year, because as the hon. minister has stated, there are 10,500 citizens reliant on this industry alone. Hopefully they will be able to rely on this industry in the future. We need to get a good handle on these commercial timber permit sales. I would appreciate from the minister precisely how many cubic metres of wood fibre will be available from commercial timber permit sales. Also, how is the department going to record data on private land timber sales? These are these log exports, and I have concern about the log cash-only transactions off private properties. Again, is that the source of all these logs a guy sees being transported on highway 2 south? One only has to go to the cafe in Innisfail and have a coffee and sit for half an hour, and I'm quite sure you will see at least one if not more trucks whiz by on the way to the U.S. border. I'm told that they're not coming from the area. You know, one would naturally think that the Sundre-Caroline area is where they would be coming from, but I'm told that they're coming from as far north as Whitecourt, and this member has some concern about that.

The stumpage. Will we need a minimum stumpage increase? If the minister could tell me what that would be in dollars per cubic metre, I would be very grateful. At the same time, if there's some sort of delicate negotiations going on between him and the hon. Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, then perhaps I could at this

time wait with respect to a collaborative effort with the other Canadian provinces in resolving this issue with the Americans.

Now, is 5 million or 6 million board feet the maximum allowable production that the minister is contemplating will be available for the smaller operators? I would like to know what that target would be. With that, I have a few questions at this time, Mr. Chairman. I would like to conclude my remarks, my questions, on this most important issue of the softwood lumber trade dispute with our American cousins.

In light of the time I have, I would like to discuss this whole issue of forest fire protection. The hon. minister is quite correct in his observation that with this blanket of snow we don't have to worry, but soon we will. We need to ensure that the machines and the operators on them are well trained. There were some contentious issues around Swan Hills a couple of years ago regarding forest fire fighting practices and the utilization of machines. I certainly hope this will be ironed out.

I notice in the business plan that one of the major strategies identified is to "keep the number of human-caused fires . . . from increasing," and that is certainly noteworthy. With lightning strikes there's not much that can be done, unfortunately. What role will education play in keeping the number of human-caused fires from increasing? Will any fines be increasing? We all know that this government is increasing sin taxes in an effort to curb or alter the behaviour of Albertans. Will the same principle be applied here?

My next question dealing with this policy of forest protection is: what is the department purchasing for \$3 million under capital investment for wildlife operations? Is it more D9s? Is it trucks to haul them from fire to fire? Is it camp equipment for the workers? What exactly is it? Is it more water bombers? I don't know.

Now, in program 5, Mr. Chairman, strategy 4.4 states that the department is going to "encourage good stewardship practices by monitoring utilization of public rangelands," and program 5, for all hon. members, is public lands management. How many staff members are responsible for these monitoring programs? What is the nature of these monitoring programs? Is it more self-reporting, that the government is so fond of? If the minister could answer these questions in due time, I would be very grateful. What form of encouragement will be used? Will strongly worded letters be used? Are there any fines associated with this encouragement?

Further on, strategy 5.3 states that the department wants to "ensure dispositions for the use of public lands are issued in a timely, effective manner with the appropriate and relevant conditions." There is no mention of the role of the public consultation or even notification being an important part of these dispositions.

4:50

Now, that concludes program 5, but in program 6, reporting agencies, Mr. Chairman, there is a difference between the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 budgets of roughly \$1.2 million. Who went over the budget here? Was it the Surface Rights Board or the Land Compensation Board? I understand that the budget was \$1.7 million, and the forecast is half a million higher now at \$2.2 million. The Surface Rights Amendment Act was supposed to take more appeals out of the courts and put them before the Surface Rights Board. Is that the reason for the budget overrun?

Mr. Chairman, I have just a few more comments in program 4, and I'll conclude my remarks for the moment. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] Oh, darn.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Just very briefly, I mentioned earlier as far as the sustainability of our forests that we probably have one of the best

forest management areas in North America, and we have something to be proud of. We have a policy in place that will never harvest more than the forests will grow. That is why out of 44 million cubic metres of forest we're harvesting about 23 million cubic metres, so we are doing quite well.

I'll try and answer just a few of these questions. Because of time I'll get the staff to answer a lot more in detail.

As far as log exports, it is not a policy we favour, but sometimes when there's a fire and burnt logs, we have a limited amount of time to process those logs. Therefore, it is necessary to always be open to export if it is necessary to do that.

You mentioned small sawmill operators. There are over 200, in fact 230, I believe, operators that process under 5 million board feet of timber each year. These are loggers and small sawmillers. These companies hopefully, because they do domestic markets, can be exempt from the free trade negotiations. The larger companies, of course, that are well diversified have a better chance of surviving some of the market trends that are out there in relation to exports to the U.S., but there are targeted groups of sawmills that produce certain amounts of dimension lumber that depend on a lot of exports for their survival. So it is a real challenge.

Areas that we're faced with in relation to the softwood lumber negotiations and disputes in Alberta. Of course, there is a concern on tenure. Our existing forest management agreements: I think the U.S. would like to see us advertise those each year and bid them out, but we will not do that in Alberta. We want to stick with the forest management agreements. Long-term tenure: if we want to have industries continue investing and expanding in Alberta in relation to forestry development, we need that long-term tenure in place.

Stumpage is another one that they would like to see change. I've always argued that stumpage maybe can change once the companies recover their capital costs plus a percentage of profit. Beyond that, you may have some room to make adjustments with the stumpage, but other than that our market-driven stumpage presently works very, very well.

The other one that's manageable is the flow of wood that goes into the U.S. as far as how much is produced each year and when we should market. Again, that's possible to manage.

You mentioned RFPs and CTPs and the bidding process. I believe that if the negotiations went the way the U.S. wanted, you would have to tender out all of your wood, and it would eliminate the CTPs, the RFPs, and all that stuff that's in place that's working quite well right now in Alberta. We still maintain that our forestry is not subsidized and will continue to defend that. The U.S. would like to see any new timber that is available marketed on open bids, and again that would really, really have a negative impact on our smaller operators across the province, who depend on the ability to access the commercial timber permits that become available.

In relation to the disposition of public lands in program 5 and program 6 on surface rights, again I'll ask my department to expand on those issues in writing. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. Are you ready for the question?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few more questions for the minister. In the interest of time I may group them and ask you to respond to them with however much time it takes.

The first is with regard to the Bighorn wildland recreation area. Both the minister and I and many members in the Assembly have had a very aggressive lobby in recent months, and certainly I know that the minister and myself have for many years faced quite an

aggressive lobby on this particular area. It's an area under pressure in this province right now, and there are two parts to the lobby.

One is those who want the Bighorn wildland recreation area designated as a wildland park using the 1986 boundaries, and in their lobby they talk about roads and motorized recreation areas remaining prohibited within that area. That's in response to the increased use we've seen of off-highway vehicles in the area. They want a wildland park designated. They state that it's one of the only places left where the backcountry can actually be experienced with the absence of the roar of ATVs and also some concerns about seeing oil and gas development in the area. So I would like to have the minister respond in terms of what they're doing there. I'll table the letter that I'm specifically referring to here. This one is from Margaret Main of Calgary, and she's specifically wanting the Bighorn to be set aside for those "who like to take the slow road and enjoy the scenery." She states that she wants her grandchildren to be able to enjoy the Bighorn the way she does.

I'll table this in a moment along with the letters that I have from some Albertans who want the government to maintain some access for off-highway vehicles in the Bighorn area. These letters are from Tom Felt of Ferintosh, Inga Witzler and Horst Witzler of Fallis, and J. Green of Calgary. They're concerned about "closure to motorized recreation in Wildland Provincial Park or West Country area." Snowmobilers, ATV users want the same rights as hikers and naturalists. They say that they pay the same taxes and should be able to enjoy the area. They believe that "there are enough protected areas" and that "with proper management these areas can be used by everyone." They say that "with proper management this area can be a great snowmobiling destination and bring economic benefits to the communities in these areas." So I'll table those as well, Mr. Chairman.

There's no doubt that the key in these letters is proper management, and we have seen increasingly over time that while many ATV users and snowmobilers are very responsible users of trails, there are those who aren't. I say this knowing that the Member for Edmonton-Centre is a very committed snowmobile user and is also very committed to the proper use of trails. Because off-road vehicles by their nature can go off the road essentially anywhere, we've seen increased deterioration in areas that were formally relatively pristine. We see degradation of streambeds particularly and hills and watershed areas, and for the most part the minister and I agree that there needs to be designated use for off-road vehicles but that we have to be very clear that it doesn't hurt watersheds particularly.

5:00

In addition to that, I side for the most part on the side of the environmentalists who want more land restricted. There is nothing worse than being in the backcountry and enjoying the very beautiful views that Alberta has to offer, both from a scenery perspective and from plant life and animal life, and then hearing the very distinct roar of ATVs tearing up and down slopes. So I think that how that progresses has to be done very strategically, and I'm hoping that we do see the designation of many areas in this province as wildlife areas and wildland parks so that we can ensure that all users in this province have access to the kind of recreation that they want, but I would be interested to hear the minister's comments on that. That's one issue that I would like him to speak to.

Another one is cervid harvesting or, as most people have come to know them, pet shoots. We've had some preliminary discussions on this, and I know that this is an area where elk farmers are looking for a change in regulations so that they can open up their farms to hunt on the land that is enclosed area. Lots of concern about that. There have been all kinds of public meetings across the province. I know

that the minister's department is involved in taking a look at a study, as is agriculture, and I would be interested in knowing where that study is going and how it's progressing and when the study will be available, if it will be public and how that will impact on any changes that will be made to the elk farmers and the potential for hunting on their land, particularly of interest given the confirmation of chronic wasting disease on a farm last month. The entire herd of 70 elk where the disease was confirmed, including 20 elk removed from that farm over the past three years, were ordered to be destroyed.

One of the main concerns that has been raised with cervid harvesting is the potential for the chronic wasting disease to be communicated to wild animals. It is a problem in Saskatchewan. It's been confirmed in Saskatchewan on more than 200 farmed elk and also on two wild mule deer since the year 2000. Alberta has about 40,000 farmed elk and 13,000 white-tailed and mule deer, so it's a huge risk for us to be taking. I know that most of the problems with the chronic wasting disease are the responsibility of the agriculture minister, but there certainly is some crossover here, and I would be interested in hearing the minister's comments both on the cervid harvesting and if they're working with the agriculture minister on containing this disease and its potential crossover to wild animals in the province.

I have a couple of other concerns that I wanted to address if possible. I know that it isn't solely the minister's responsibility, but I am sure that he is having some input within the ministry on the government's position on the Kyoto accord. More particularly I am interested in anything that the minister's department or the minister may be doing in terms of pursuing a policy of working towards tradeable permits and credits for the province. It's my position that the Environment minister is in a role where he can take real leadership for this province at the federal table and ensure that our industries are protected while still moving forward on CO₂ emissions. I think that that is by pursuing the ability of this government of this province to have tradeable permits and credits and also the issue of taking a look at the consumer of the product being the person who actually takes the responsibility for the CO₂ emissions rather than the producer of the product. So I'm sure your department has had some feedback and input on that, and I would like to know what that is.

Also, I would like to know what involvement you have in the G-8 summit. We know that the summit is going to be held in a beautiful part of Alberta but also a vulnerable part of Alberta. I think particularly there's the increased potential for fire hazards during the summit. So if he could comment on any participation he has in the summit and any recommendations that they've made in terms of security around the issue and any recommendations their department has made in terms of Alberta's position with regard to that summit.

So I'll let the minister respond to those questions at this point.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon. member, in your comments you mentioned that you would be tabling some material. We need that for our records.

MS CARLSON: Ready to do that now, yes. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much. Very briefly. Three of the issues you mentioned – the cervid hunt, Kyoto, and the G-8 summit – are also involving other departments. I will ensure that the staff jointly with the other departments respond to that.

Very briefly on the Bighorn issue, because that is also a very

important issue. It is a very large resource-rich region and a very popular spot for many recreational activities in southwestern Alberta. About 4,000 square kilometres have several different land use zones, including 80 percent designated for prime protection or as a critical wildlife zone under the eastern slopes policy. The Bighorn Advisory Group, which involved 15 public members and also six department officials, will provide advice on balancing the needs of different land users or proposed land users in that area.

Some of the off-highway vehicle activity in the Bighorn area does not comply presently with the eastern slopes policy, but it is not illegal activity by legislation. This access plan will address these issues, so I am looking forward to the report, which should be submitted in the near future. We are looking at a balanced approach. I believe there is enough room there for all users, and we can do it in a balanced way.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One other question for the minister: are there any resources in the budget to look at the situation in terms of sturgeon in the North Saskatchewan River? We've talked about fish stocks in a number of lakes in other parts of the province. There is an ongoing interest in the health of the North Saskatchewan River and the fish stocks there, particularly the sturgeon population, and as the representative of certainly the only constituency in the city of Edmonton that sits on both sides of the river, I have a particular interest in this. So if there are some resources in the budget to examine that issue, I'd be interested to know.

Thanks.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: We'll do it in writing.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I, too, have a couple of questions here that I couldn't get on the record and get the needed answers previous. Now, this also has to deal with program 4, fish and wildlife management, and my first question is in reference to 4.0.2. How is the department going to deal with the 40 percent cut to the program operating expenses in business management? Also, will the increase to the fisheries and wildlife management program, 4.0.3, mean more enforcement officers?

Under strategy 3.5 the department wants to "maintain up-to-date management plans for all game species." What is the status of this? How many are updated and how many are not? How many staff actually work on this specific project, and are any of these positions going to be cut?

5:10

Mr. Chairman, further along here what is the government doing to maintain and restore fish habitat? Now, is killing cormorants the best idea the department has? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry was describing to me the amount of fish – and I was astonished – that these birds can consume in a day. How about maintaining appropriate water levels in the south rather than letting irrigation have all the water? How is the department dealing with that issue, and how much habitat maintenance does the government

actually do, and how much is done through groups like the Alberta Conservation Association and also TUC?

With those questions, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my gratitude to the minister today for his co-operation and his responses. Thank you.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you. We'll do it in writing.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay. After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development, are you ready for the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$181,441,000
Capital Investment	\$3,035,000

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report the estimates of Sustainable Resource Development and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2003, for the following department.

Sustainable Resource Development: operating expense and capital investment, \$184,476,000.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to table copies of documents tabled during Committee of Supply this day for the official records of the Assembly.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 8 p.m., at which time we return in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]