

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 25, 2002**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 02/04/25

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. On this day let each of us pray in our own way for the innocent victims of violence. Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted. In a moment of silent contemplation may we now allow our thoughts to remember those taken before their time, those who have suffered through tragedies, and reach out to the families, friends, neighbours, and communities most immediately impacted. May God provide them eternal peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a guest sitting in the Speaker's gallery. She's Mrs. Sharon Shewchuk, who is residing in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan near Sherwood Park. Mrs. Shewchuk is the mother of Brent Shewchuk, our own head page here in the Legislature. I'd ask Mrs. Shewchuk to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I'm pleased to present two sets of introductions. First of all, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly seven hardworking staff members from International and Intergovernmental Relations. They are here today taking part in one of the legislative tours for public service staff. They are Laurel Swayze, Kerrie Henson, Candice Thibault, Cynthia Tait, Helen Stiles, Rose Smallman, and Ian McMillan. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome to the Assembly 28 students from New Norway school, located in my constituency in the fine village of New Norway. They are led by their teacher, Mr. Martinson, and accompanied by Mr. Kruse, Mrs. Mowat, Mrs. Jans, and Mrs. Captain. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Michael Debolt. Michael is from Lethbridge. He is a University of Lethbridge student and is joining us here in Edmonton for summer employment. I would like you to welcome Michael Debolt. Mike, could you stand. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure and an honour for me to introduce to you and through you

to members of this Assembly two very important women in my life. Visiting today is my aunt Mary Hendren of Kelowna, B.C., who is accompanied by my daughter Robyn Danyluk. My Aunt Mary is hopeful that her presence in the gallery this afternoon will ensure that I uphold the honour of the family name, and also in this spirit I am proud to announce that this morning Robyn finished her final exam of the year in her second degree for education. If I could ask them to stand, please.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of about 50 young students. Quite differently than most, these are from all over Alberta and are taking their education through the School of Hope, which is located in Vermilion. In fact, three of the members are from the Speaker's riding, and other students are from Red Deer, Calgary, Edmonton, and Turner Valley. This enthusiastic group today is accompanied by their teachers, Ms. Carla Hanf and Ms. Lucia Fredette, and some helpers: Mrs. Charlotte Burns, Mr. Dele Ajele, and Mrs. Uta Wanke. I apologize completely if I've got those names screwed up. I will ask them to rise now and please accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly 26 great young students from Gerard Redmond school in Hinton. They are grade 5 students, and today with them they have their teacher and a group leader, Miss Dawson and Mrs. Pysar, and parents and helpers. They've got Mr. Carby, Mr. Bertwistle, Mr. Lougheed, Mrs. Handlon, Mrs. Dallaire, Mrs. Read, Mrs. Mills, and Mrs. McRorie. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you seven members of my constituency. What makes these visitors special today is that they're all members of my Sunday school class. I'd like to introduce Nathan Oehring, Spencer Smith, my son Brent Ady, Jon Crosson, Amy Sefcik, and Stephanie Forbes, and the brave woman who brought them, Vickie Oehring. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the House the president of the Injured Workers Coalition Society, Mr. Ralph Teed. Mr. Teed is seated in the public gallery. Mr. Teed and the Injured Workers Coalition are indeed valuable advocates for injured workers. They stand up for and offer assistance and support to injured workers and their families wherever they can. I would ask Mr. Teed to please 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. It's my privilege to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly three guests: Erich Schmidt, Peter Doering, and Jeannette

Semeniuk. These three hardworking individuals were injured at work. Erich Schmidt was injured in the early 1980s. He suffers from serious physical and mental impact of the accident and ongoing severe pain. Peter Doering also had an accident at work in the early 1980s. It took the Workers' Compensation Board over a year and a half to determine that his employer had no WCB coverage. He's now 74 years old and needs a shoulder replacement as a result of his injury. Jeannette Semeniuk also had an accident in 1998, and her claim has also been denied. These workers are examples of some hundreds of injured workers in Alberta who are still waiting to receive justice, compensation, and support to lead a dignified life. These guests are seated in the members' gallery, and now I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, shortly I'm going to call on the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment to participate in Ministerial Statements. Under our rules once the representative of Executive Council gives his ministerial statement, there's an opportunity for the representative of the second party in the House to also make a statement. Today I received a request – and I gather it's been discussed on an intercaucus basis – from the leader of the third party to make a brief statement as well. This will require unanimous consent of the House, so I'll ask one question. Is there any member in the Assembly opposed to the request being asked by the leader of the third party to participate? If so, please say no.

[Unanimous consent granted]

1:40

head: **Ministerial Statements**

### **National Day of Mourning**

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, Sunday, the 28th day of April, is our National Day of Mourning for Canadian workers who have been killed or injured on the job. We honour those victims by remembering them and by renewing our commitment to safer workplaces.

Workplace fatalities and injuries in Alberta happen in disproportionate numbers to inexperienced and young workers. Half of our workplace injuries are for workers in their first year on the job, and 60 percent of workers under the age of 25 are hurt in their first six months on the job. On our National Day of Mourning we need to think about protecting the young working Albertans who truly are the future of this province. We need to think about the human cost of workplace fatalities: the mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, and children that are left behind. This will always remind us that all incidents are preventable and all incidents unacceptable.

Last year in Alberta 118 workers died on the job. Ceremonies honouring our fallen workers will be held in communities across the province. I would ask that all members of the Assembly reflect on our losses and remember that one workplace fatality is one too many. We can never be satisfied until we know that we have done everything we can to bring Alberta workers home to their families safely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On average one Canadian worker out of 13 is injured at work. On average one Alberta worker out of 11 is injured at work. Furthermore, almost every week in Alberta there is a case of work site trauma resulting in a fatality. Those are Albertans, very often young or inexperienced workers, who die as a direct result of their work activity.

The hon. minister has taken steps to address this, and I would like to commend him at this time for those steps. He initiated a \$300,000

multimedia campaign to raise awareness of safety issues on Alberta work sites. He has also indicated that his department will more vigorously pursue safety violations in the courts. That sends a powerful signal to Alberta employers to ensure that they keep to the standards established in our province. These are steps that again I would like to congratulate and commend the minister on.

However, as the minister has acknowledged, we cannot rest until we have done everything we can to avoid workplace tragedies. I would encourage the minister to focus even more attention on his 1-800 call centre concept, which explains to Alberta workers our occupational health and safety law and its regulations. This is a good idea, but I believe it suffers from bad marketing. On a visit I made recently to a work site, nobody there had ever heard of the 1-800 call centre. I would ask the minister to initiate a new awareness campaign for this, perhaps a sticker campaign. The information about the call centre should be part of safety training for all workers and a mandatory topic at on-the-job safety meetings.

So many of these workplace tragedies, Mr. Speaker, are preventable. We must all work together to reduce the tragedies and stem the horrifying trend of more and more younger workers being injured or maimed or killed. On the National Day of Mourning I join on behalf of my caucus colleagues all those families who have been affected in remembering those who have been killed or injured on the job.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Sunday, April 28, citizens of over a hundred countries around the world will stand in solidarity with and pay tribute to those injured or killed doing their jobs. April 28 was chosen as the day of remembrance because it was on this day in 1914 in Ontario that the first comprehensive Workmen's Compensation Act received third reading. As well, in February 1991 an act respecting a day of mourning for persons killed or injured in the workplace, that called upon the Parliament of Canada to officially recognize April 28 as a day of mourning, received royal assent. This bill was put forward by NDP Member of Parliament Rod Murphy.

Workplace safety remains an important issue, Mr. Speaker. According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions more than 500 workers are killed at work every day around the world. In Canada two workers are killed every day. These are men and women who leave their homes each day to go to their places of employment expecting to return at the end of the day safe and sound. They give to society their talents, their skills, their sweat, and deserve in return not only an appreciation for their labours but a work site that respects them as workers by providing a danger-free work site. Our focus must remain on prevention and on making certain that our workplaces are healthy and safe, free from risk of injury, disease, and death.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

### **Case Plans for Children in Care**

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Case plans are vital to children who are in the government's temporary care. Case plans require that child welfare workers conduct parenting assessments. If the child remains in the home, they require a description of the service to be provided in-home. They require that the family knows

how often they can visit their child, and they require that the family know what is expected of them in order for them to regain custody of their child. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Am I interpreting the Child Welfare Act correctly by saying that the government considers it imperative for parents and social workers to have a description of the services to be provided in support of their children in care?

MS EVANS: That's correct.

DR. NICOL: Am I interpreting the Child Welfare Act correctly by saying that the government considers it imperative that families are told what they need to do to regain custody of their children?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I want to approach this answer this way. In the very first instance, when we apprehend a child and bring it into care, we do so because the child is at great risk. The child is at risk from its current provider, be they parent or guardian. We bring in those children, and we go to the courts and apply for temporary guardianship. We have in all cases got care plans prepared for the services that are rendered to the child. Sometimes those care plans are amended. In the case that has prompted us coming forward and asking for Bill 24 to be provided and passed by this House, it is imperative, given the very recent decision that rejected the appeal from our department to give us a longer stay on the validation of those orders, that for the child's protection we continue to have an uninterrupted opportunity to provide care for those children.

Today, Mr. Speaker, in light of a number of concerns that have been raised as well as concerns that I have held, the deputy has contacted the directors in every authority where there has been some question of validation and has requested the director to do two things: to look first of all at those cases which have been not consented to by the parent or guardian and look at emergency response for reappréhension and to inform all parents that this legislation is before this House, because we still have a concern for the care and protection of those children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: does Bill 24 not allow the government to skip its responsibility for providing case plans for those hundreds of children that the court was talking about?

MS EVANS: No, it doesn't, Mr. Speaker. We do have those care plans. We were not able after March 4 to file those retroactively. This piece of legislation and the commitment I provide to this House is to provide us an opportunity to validate those temporary guardianship orders, to submit those care plans, and to make sure that the child's right to be protected and the child's safety are assured and that we follow through on that behalf. Heretofore, current plans and current status of temporary guardianship, all care plans, will be filed, must be filed, and that's very clear to every member of our department.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the purpose of question period is not to debate legislation where time is otherwise provided for.

Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the retroactive provision of Bill 24 to compensate for the lack of staff and resources required

to prepare case plans for the hundreds of children for whom the case plans were not potentially filed?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in light of your previous comments, do you wish me to engage in this discussion?

### **Speaker's Ruling Anticipation**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Bill 24, to my understanding, was on the agenda last evening. It was debated last evening. I understand, as well, that it passed second reading last evening. It's now into Committee of the Whole. It's on the Order Paper or will eventually come there. Opportunity is afforded at another time of the day in the Routine and the agenda for the debate of bills.

Please proceed, hon. leader.

### **Case Plans for Children in Care (continued)**

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, can the minister please explain why it is important to include the retroactive provision in Bill 24?

THE SPEAKER: Briefly, hon. minister, if you would.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is important because we believe that the children in care must be protected. Where it's necessary for us to issue yet another order to emergency apprehend children so that we can absolutely guarantee their protection, we will do so.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is it the purpose of Bill 24 to allow the government to justify its failure to comply with the Child Welfare Act for these hundreds of cases?

MS EVANS: You know, Mr. Speaker, may I assure the hon. member opposite that I am as concerned about this bill and about the circumstances as he is. I give you my word: I am following up on it. I promise.

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

### **Day Care Policy**

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents upset about children allegedly abused and neglected in a St. Albert day home have looked to the Minister of Children's Services for help. The minister has walked away from them, responding yesterday, "We have to make it clear and communicate buyer beware when [parents] go to day cares." My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Why has the minister walked away from these parents, treating concerns about their children no more than those of a used car purchase gone bad?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I am fascinated by the hon. member's opportunity to extrapolate one sentence from responses I gave in this House yesterday indicating that I am absolutely concerned. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has met to look at legislation, to look at ways that we can toughen up legislation. I was concerned when I responded yesterday for several reasons, not only because of the safety of the children but because somehow we have to find ways to assure that parents understand. That was part of the intent of putting subsidies to parents that are taking their children to day care,

that we were not any longer going to provide operational subsidies to day cares themselves because we felt that it was imperative for parents to go out and thoroughly explore those issues.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that somebody contacted my office yesterday and gave grave concern that I was feeling that they had not done their due diligence. I did not say that. I think many of those parents were successfully hoodwinked by somebody who had obviously broken the law in a very unfortunate manner and in a way that we have had very great difficulty in following up, but we will certainly follow up on that. I did not resolve to abdicate any responsibility. In fact, we're looking not only at the legislative review process for changing and toughening it up, but we've spoken to licensing officers, the child welfare director, about ways and means that we can make sure that we spot-check what parents report in a fashion that does not allow them to skip out, if you will, or to make another arrangement so that it looks like they're doing well.

Right back to the very first, Mr. Speaker, it is always the parent's responsibility. I would never have given up responsibility for my child to do anything.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member. [some applause]

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that welcome of my question by my colleagues.

My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Doesn't the government have an obligation to protect all children in the province, even those in day homes?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first obligation to protect children, I would suggest, is with the mother and the father. That's the first obligation. Where other protection, where other services are provided, yes, it is this government's duty and responsibility. We undertake that with social workers, with day care providers, and with people as well as we can. We're not perfect, but we're doing our best. But, please, let's remember: it is primarily the parents.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why are children in day cares protected in legislation while those in day homes are not?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, while we have rules and regulations that apply to day homes, we may well look at enshrining those further in our Child Welfare Act, but I can assure you that the families that are supported in day homes have every bit the due diligence responsibilities afforded first of all to the licensing officers and to the people that go forward and authorize or validate day homes. In this particular situation I think it should not be used or extrapolated to be a generalized attitude about day homes in this province. Many day homes are providing wonderful care for children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

#### Health Resource Centre

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the House the Minister of Health and Wellness continued to dodge questions about the HRC's application to bring American-style health care to Canada. The minister claimed that the application wasn't secret at all, that it was on the web site. My staff checked the HRC web site,

the ministry's web site, the government web site, and did full Internet searches, but no such public disclosure exists, and we found nothing. After repeated calls to the minister's office his staff informed us that the minister had indeed misinformed the House. My question to the minister: rather than continuing to dodge questions about letting the American-style health care system creep into Alberta through the back door, will the minister agree to release this application today rather than avoid his responsibility to be accountable to the House?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the characterization that I have not been accountable to this House, and I wish to read back my exact answer, taken in complete context, in response to the hon. member's question from yesterday in the Legislature: "Mr. Speaker, I'm advised that HRC . . . has placed its application on the web site." I was advised of that. That may be erroneous, but there was no intent at all to mislead the House, and I wish him to withdraw such a characterization.

Mr. Speaker, I was advised that it was placed on the web site. It would have made sense since HRC itself had a press conference where they in fact were handing out copies of their application that they had submitted to the Department of Health and Wellness for consideration. I think that the hon. member knows that. I will undertake to contact HRC and suggest to them that they do place such application on the web site. They apparently have no disagreement with doing so, having released it through a press release, so I'm certain that they'll do that. I will advise them that that would be my suggestion to them. Perhaps that might satisfy the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is the minister's responsibility to check the correctness or accuracy of his advice, not mine.

Will the minister at least commit to seeking a legal opinion on whether or not this application will trigger NAFTA challenges, forcing Alberta to open the door to all American health corporations and HMOs? If not, why not, Minister?

2:00

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, that's not part of our agenda. Our agenda is about a publicly funded health care system that has outstanding services, is affordable, is sustainable, and has great access. That is our agenda. I don't have any such intention to seek such legal opinion. We are moving forward on the agenda that we've put forth, as set out in the response tabled by this government to the recommendations set out by the Premier's Advisory Council on Health. It's an outstanding document, and it has been downloaded tens of thousands of times since its release. I think that Albertans understand what our agenda is, and they will not be persuaded by the hon. member who suggests some other sort of agenda.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What does it say about the future of Alberta's health care system when the minister in charge and his first decision on a private facility leave us open to a NAFTA challenge and an all-out American-style health care system?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of question period, as you have stated on a number of occasions, is not to elicit legal opinions. Of course, nobody is asking the hon. member for his legal opinion either.

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

### Temporary Guardianship Orders

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Child Welfare Act a director makes an application in court for a temporary guardianship order

if, in the opinion of the director,

- (a) the child is in need of protective services, and
- (b) the survival, security or development of the child . . .

are endangered by leaving the child in the care of the guardian. Given the recent ruling of the Court of Appeal that invalidates over 600 temporary guardianship orders across Alberta, my question is to the Minister of Children's Services, who is ultimately responsible for those 600 children. What is the minister doing to ensure the safety of these children with the cancellation of the temporary guardianship orders?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, on April 25, when our stay application was invalidated, as I've explained already in the House this afternoon, we are going forward to each one of those directors, following through with the parents, following through on those that were most contested. We are making sure that those children are looked after, and if we feel that any children are imperiled because of somebody wishing to gain again their right to guardianship of those children, we will be acting immediately with an emergency apprehension order. They are currently still being provided in most cases due care and attention. In some circumstances we may well find that they have already been returned to their parent or guardian, but in all cases we will be assuring both the parents and Albertans of their safety.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, if in the minister's findings the concern is towards adequate resources being provided to child welfare workers to meet their work requirements, will the minister assure us that those resources will be made available to the child welfare workers so that they can follow the Child Welfare Act as it is today?

MS EVANS: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

### Health Care Facilities

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier thought that the question we asked him, whether a hospital without an emergency ward is still a hospital, was "an interesting question." Well, that's kind of an interesting answer, because government legislation, namely Bill 11, also known as the Health Care Protection Act, indicates that a hospital without an emergency ward is in fact no longer a hospital. So let's give the government a chance to clear this up. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that facilities like the one in Grimshaw provide acute care, intensive care, surgery, palliative care, and a number of other procedures, would it still be considered a hospital when its emergency room is closed?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it's not clear to me how this particular question is relevant. The real relevant question is: what services are required for a particular community? The Premier commented yesterday in the House that the proximity of Grimshaw to a brand-

new facility in Peace River is quite close. So the real issue is not what we call something. The real issue is about: what services does it provide that are required by the community?

Mr. Speaker, regional health authorities, I need not remind the hon. member, are elected to do exactly that. They are elected to determine what services are required by a particular group of people within the area that they service. I'm certain that the people from the regional health authority that have responsibility for the people that live in and around the area of Grimshaw will certainly take into account the real needs of that particular community and will govern themselves accordingly by delivering the kinds of services out of Grimshaw or out of the Peace River regional hospital in a manner that is most appropriate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, words do matter, and definitions do matter.

Can the minister confirm that according to government policy, closing the emergency room at a large city hospital, say, like the Royal Alex or the Rockyview would also mean that those facilities would no longer be considered hospitals?

MR. MAR: Perhaps the hon. member knows something about the closure of an emergency room at the Royal Alex that I'm not aware of. If he does, he should share it.

MS BLAKEMAN: He's not answering the question.

DR. TAFT: He's not answering the question; is he? Well, let's try again.

Will the minister simply, then, admit that according to common sense, there is no real distinction between a for-profit, private hospital and a nonhospital surgical facility?

AN HON. MEMBER: What do you know about common sense?

MR. MAR: Well, I certainly haven't heard any yet, Mr. Speaker.

You know, what is set out in the Health Care Protection Act, Bill 11, is not about hospitals. It is about private surgical facilities. Any characterization that this member makes that they are hospitals is an incorrect characterization. The College of Physicians and Surgeons has a process by which facilities are accredited. Those facilities are accredited to provide for minor surgical procedures to be done. Major surgeries, as defined not by government but as defined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, can only be done in public hospitals. So this characterization that the facilities laid out in the Health Care Protection Act are somehow hospitals is incorrect.

### Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: The chair would like to advise the hon. member for Edmonton-Riverview that he agrees entirely with the hon. member's supposition that words are important and thence would like to draw to the attention of not only this hon. member but others *Beauchesne* 409(3).

The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

### Commercial Fisheries

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's fish are a valuable and very popular natural resource. Recreational fishing contributes approximately \$350 million to the provincial economy each year, and commercial fishing adds about \$5 million annually. Recently Alberta Sustainable Resource Development announced a strategy regarding commercial fishing. My first question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What led to your ministry's decision to reduce commercial fishing operations in our province?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Part of the overall plan to rationalize both the sportfishing industry and also the commercial fishing industry is basically at the request of the Commercial Fishermen's Association of Alberta and also the Alberta Fish and Game Association and other sportfishing organizations. There are over 300,000 sport fishermen out there and also over 800 commercial fishermen competing for the quality of fish and quantity of fish we have out there. We only have over a thousand lakes that are fish-bearing lakes. Therefore, it is necessary for us to look at how we are going to rationalize the industry. You know, there's also a lot of pressure because of the population growth in Alberta. In fact, Alberta actually has the third highest fishing pressure in Canada. Therefore, we needed to move on a plan to rationalize both the sportfishing and the commercial fishing industries.

2:10

REV. ABBOTT: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the same minister. How will reducing the number of commercial fishing operators benefit Alberta's fisheries?

MR. CARDINAL: Well, generally, like I said earlier, what we have out there is over 300,000 sport fishermen with an industry of about \$350 million or so, and we also have 800 commercial fishermen, about a \$5 million industry annually. What we are targeting, Mr. Speaker, at the request of the commercial fisheries and the sports fisheries, is reducing the 800 active commercial fishermen to about 200 and reducing the yardage from about 37,100 yard nets to about 18,100 yard nets so that the industry will be sustainable. At this time the commercial fishing industry is so large for the amount of fish we have in our lakes that it is not totally economically viable and very hard to manage. What this process will do is reduce it to a management level, at the same time making that commercial fisheries industry more economically viable and manageable, which in turn will have a positive impact on the sportfishing industry.

REV. ABBOTT: Mr. Speaker, my final question is also to the same minister. Given that many of my constituents don't want to give up their licences or feel that the compensation is not adequate, what can those who don't wish to give up their licences do to keep them? Will there be some kind of an appeal process?

MR. CARDINAL: Yes, Mr. Speaker, as part of the overall reduction you will see some changes in the licensing. For an example, there will be some increases in licences and a reduction in fact in a number of the commercial licences. What we are doing is not trying to negatively impact the commercial fishing industry, especially the smaller operators. What we want to do is ensure that we have processes in place to deal with any hardship we may create to the industry. Therefore, we are also establishing a hardship committee

or an appeal panel that will review each case by case to ensure that we don't hurt that industry.

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

### Forest Industry

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In October 1999 the government proudly announced two new forestry projects by Ainsworth and ABCOR. What hasn't been so proudly announced is that recently both of these projects were put on hold. It has been almost three years since the original request for proposals, and it could be another two years until we see any further actions. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given that information from your department confirms that there are not enough trees to keep existing mills working at capacity, why are you still allowing these new projects to proceed?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, there are enough trees to sustain our forest industry in Alberta. The forest industry is a very, very important industry. It employs over 54,000 employees directly and indirectly, and no doubt a lot of the member's constituents also work in that industry. It's an \$8 billion industry and very, very active. We have a policy in place that we will not harvest more than we can grow out in the forest. Therefore, to say that the industry is not sustainable, that is not true. The industry is sustainable and very active.

Now, as we move forward in calling for new projects like the hon. member mentioned, what we have to keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, are the markets out there. They have to be economically viable when we move forward, and we have to have some flexibility so that when companies have difficulty, say, in arranging financing or markets, we co-ordinate our adjustments to the approval processes as required, because it is definitely necessary.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, then is the minister saying that the information from his department that confirms that there are not enough trees to keep existing mills working at capacity is inaccurate?

MR. CARDINAL: No, Mr. Speaker. There are enough. In fact, we just completed an inventory of all the mill capacities in Alberta and what the mills require in order to operate economically. We've also done a complete review of the available stock of our resources, and the stock of resources is considerably higher than what the capacity of our existing mills is. Therefore, we are moving forward with a process to look at how we may best allocate those resources to existing operators, and that's going to take a bit of time.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, since it's been almost three years since the original review of these projects was done and then only the economics of the proposals were considered, will the minister review the environmental impact of these projects on our province?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, we have the NRCB in place. In fact, with any of the larger projects that do make an application, if there is a requirement for an environmental impact assessment study on any project, then they are done. In some cases the projects don't require that. Projects sometimes are straightforward and smaller and create, you know, less pollution, and they will go without an environmental impact assessment.

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

### Canadian MDF

MR. RATHGEBER: Mr. Speaker, residents in the Edmonton-Calder constituency are quite concerned about a proposal that is being advanced by a company in the constituency. I understand that this company, Canadian MDF, has applied to Alberta Environment for approval to generate electricity, while I understand that they are primarily in the business of manufacturing moldings and not electricity. Accordingly, my question is to the Minister of Environment. What exactly is Canadian MDF applying for?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. Canadian MDF does in fact manufacture architectural moldings, but as a by-product of this there is a lot of sawdust, which they have typically trucked off-site. They have now put in an approval application to the department to produce electricity from this sawdust rather than trucking it off-site, so they're going to recycle the sawdust. They've put in an application for a 1.2 megawatt plant. This plant would produce more than their needs, and then they would be able to sell the rest of it into the grid. That's a direct result of electrical deregulation.

MR. RATHGEBER: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Does this mean that Canadian MDF would be classified as a power plant if in fact approval were to be granted?

DR. TAYLOR: Any power project that produces more than one megawatt in our regulations will qualify as a power plant. With Canadian MDF, then, that part of their business, the power plant business, would be called a power plant and would have to correspond to the regulations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, I was curious if the minister could advise this House as to what is the current status of the application.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We have received the application. We have gone back to Canadian MDF for a more complete application. There were some questions that we need answered. Once we get that information from Canadian MDF, we will be processing their application.

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

### WCB Appeals Commission

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The annual report of the Appeals Commission of the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board for the year 2000 indicates that 998 hearings were conducted and that 45 percent of these hearings were overturned or modified in some way. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, the minister in charge of the Appeals Commission. Why did the budget of the Appeals Commission increase from \$3.1 million in 1996 to \$4.6 million five years later, in the year 2000, when the actual workload of the Appeals Commission was reduced? Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, that the workload actually did decrease. It's difficult to be able to interpret that from the preamble and from the particular question. I don't have the report here at my fingertips, but that's something we can look into and can get back to the hon. member with an answer.

I want to say that one of the concerns that he had pointed out in his preamble was the number of appeal decisions that were overturned by one method or another, and that's why we have contemplated trying to change that. Of course, it is contemplated that legislation will come through this House to be able to deal with that, and I would encourage the hon. member's complete support on that initiative.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the bigger budget for the Appeals Commission, more staff, and now less work, why are the staffing levels, as the annual reports indicate, going up? In 1996 there were 24 staff in the Appeals Commission. In the year 2000 there were 38. Why the increase in staff when the workload and the actual number of cases heard is going down?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what more I can add to my answer on the first question. Certainly we will be glad to look into that particular matter, but there's ample evidence, I think, that people are trying to respond to the concerns of injured workers. I think the whole system has become more sensitized to that. Certainly over the last couple of years, as the hon. member knows, we've been trying to find ways to deal with the situation that many injured workers have found themselves in. We're certainly interested in making the appeals system and in fact the Workers' Compensation Board itself more open and accountable.

Transparency is a word that we now use more and more, because we find in the modern economies that the more open and transparent that companies are, it actually leads to improved relationships, of course, with the clients they serve. All of this is what we're trying to achieve in the current time frame. Again, I look forward to the member's enthusiastic support for the initiatives that we're bringing forward.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: is the minister concerned about the number of applications from the Appeals Commission that are overturned by the court?

MR. DUNFORD: The answer to that question is yes, Mr. Speaker. To that extent, we are trying to bring forward under legislation a system that would see the Appeals Commission more independent from the WCB but also to try to find new and better ways to resolve differences of opinion that are in fact leading to the appeals themselves. Certainly a hearing is always there, available for an injured worker or for an employer that simply is not in agreement with the kinds of decisions that are being made. But again we would hope, with the new openness and transparency, that we'll find a higher degree of comfort and a higher degree of compliance with the decisions as they are rendered.

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

### High School Enrollment Credits

MR. MASON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The provincial budget contained a provision that capped the number of credits for grade 10 students. After a huge public outcry the Minister of Learning reversed this provision and eliminated the credit cap. Now

it looks like the minister that flip-flopped has done a flop-flip. The ministry has devised a funding formula that amounts to another credit cap for grade 10 students. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Why is the minister, who reversed the decision to cap credits for grade 10 students, once again reversing himself and reinstating what amounts to a cap on student learning?

THE SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. minister, recognizing that his budget is up for debate in just a few minutes from now.

DR. OBERG: Absolutely. If the hon. member is here this afternoon, I'd be more than happy to discuss it with him.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister's offer, but I would like to ask him whether or not the chair of Edmonton public schools is correct when he says that his board could lose as much as \$3 million in funding next year as a result of this act.

DR. OBERG: No, he is not.

MR. MASON: Why?

DR. OBERG: Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, under the new funding formula we will be funding on a per-student basis. For those students who take 31 credits or more, they will get funded very close to \$5,000, which is roughly \$600 more than a grade 9 student. For those students that are taking 30 credits or less, they will be funded at half that rate.

The Edmonton public school board has an average of 43, 43 and a half credits for grade 10. I have heard that there have been issues with how these credits have been given out, and I will not air Edmonton public's dirty laundry in public any more than that. But trust me, Mr. Speaker, that these are things that will benefit the majority of systems in this province.

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

### Immigration Policy

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First I would like to ask you to allow me to explain the background of this serious situation. In Calgary there is a young family with capable and hardworking parents who have three very young children aged eight and seven and the youngest was born in Calgary 15 months ago. This family came to my office and asked me for help because they had been asked to leave Canada and return to Mexico. I referred them to our local MP because it is an important and urgent matter impacting the livelihood and welfare of three very young children, one being born Canadian. I asked them to see an immigration lawyer and also Alberta legal aid. With my limited understanding of Canada's immigration administrative process, I wrote a letter to Immigration Canada in Calgary to see if they could help and told the family to talk to the priests in their church to prepare for character witnesses in the community to support their case should an immigration hearing take place. Given that Alberta needs workers and Canada's population demography shows that we need young people and more children, my questions today are to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Could the minister explain to us Alberta's involvement in Immigration Canada?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, under our Constitution immigration is an area of shared responsibility between ourselves as a provincial government and the federal government. With respect to representation that goes forward on individual cases, I would, from the hon. member's question, like to commend him because I think he has certainly been pursuing the proper and correct route in terms of making representation on behalf of individuals that are here. I don't know if they have landed immigrant status, perhaps not, but this is the route that has to be taken with these types of cases. I would like to clarify, as the member indicated, that Alberta is involved in areas such as business immigration and settlement services, but ultimately the approval of individual cases as far as immigration is concerned in this country does rest with the federal government.

The province does have a role, as I've said, in the whole area of matters related to learning and related to job placements and so forth, and it may be that the hon. Minister of Learning would want to supplement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member, please.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Based on the request from the family, my letter to Immigration specified that they allow the family to stay until July 15, 2002, so that the children can finish school and the parents can continue to work to earn some expense money for their potential long trip back to Mexico. So my question is to the Minister of Learning. Could the minister help by contacting his counterparts in the federal jurisdiction to inquire about the status of this humanitarian case?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly have no problem in contacting the minister of immigration. I will say, however, that the minister of immigration is under legal obligation not to talk about individual cases with specific people. I can put forward the case on the hon. member's behalf, but again there is absolutely no obligation on behalf of the minister to share any details with me or with the hon. member. I will certainly, though, put the case forward.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you.

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

2:30

### Medical Savings Accounts

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the medical savings accounts, the Minister of Health and Wellness said in August of 2000, and I quote: Albertans need to know very clearly that this is not something we would consider. End quote. However, now the government is indeed considering this option. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why the flip-flop?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member knows that that comment was made prior to the Mazankowski report being put forward and our response, which was tabled before Albertans in January of this year. I remind hon. members that there are 44 recommendations set out in the Mazankowski report. The government in its response has indicated that we are moving forward on all 44.



One of the recommendations, Mr. Speaker, focuses on the financing of the health care system, and that is: how do we pay for the system? The recommendations talk about sources of revenue, where it comes from, who pays for what, and so on and so forth, and one of the recommendations for consideration is variable premium accounts. Another one is medical savings accounts, and there are other iterations of financing of the health care system that the Mazankowski recommendations lay out for us to consider.

We cannot say at this time what the final outcome of that recommendation is going to be. The hon. member knows that our colleague from Grande Prairie-Wapiti is going to be in charge of a committee that will be looking at the financing of the health care system. I'm certain that that hon. member and that committee will take into serious consideration all of the various options. What we're looking for is a made-in-Alberta solution, Mr. Speaker. We know that medical savings accounts are used in other jurisdictions, like Singapore. We know that there are other ways of financing the health care system that are employed in other jurisdictions in Canada, in the United States, and in other parts of the world. We want to look at all of them and ask ourselves what would make the most sense for Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. Given that the academic community has expressed serious reservation over the MSAs, can the minister assure us that in fact this academic research will be considered along with what's been proposed by the Mazankowski report?

MR. MAR: Well, yes, I can make that assurance, Mr. Speaker. It does make sense that we would rely upon the best available advice that we have. There is no clear evidence one way or the other as to whether or not medical savings accounts in fact are good or not good. Of course, the hon. member would be familiar with the work of Dr. David Gratzner, a physician from the province of Ontario who has written an award-winning book entitled *Code Blue*, where he is a very strong advocate in favour of medical savings accounts. Of course, there are scholarly treatises, works that are done that have come to the opposite conclusion, but I'm certain that our committee will look at all of the evidence that is available, weigh it out, and determine what will be best for Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. Could the minister tell us about any locations where he's aware that the MSAs have worked very well and that those kinds of MSAs could be integrated into our current system?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would entreat the hon. member to read the work of Dr. Gratzner. It's a very good piece of research. She may agree or disagree with the conclusions that Dr. Gratzner makes in his work, but it is a very strong canvassing of financing systems for health care in other jurisdictions. Other things that he outlines in his book are whether or not user fees work. He weighs out some of the pros and cons of that particular manner of financing the health care system. Dr. Gratzner, I should also note, is having a book release of his most recent book, which will be coming out this afternoon, that I expect hon. members will want to read if they wish to inform themselves more about the health care system.

Mr. Speaker, all of these things we'll take into consideration. Perhaps a strict medical savings account approach does not work in

Alberta, but our committee will make that determination. Perhaps variable premium accounts instead will make sense, but again this is all speculative. We will, of course, make a decision after we've weighed all of the evidence.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

#### Off-highway Fuel Tax Exemption

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Revenue. Recently I received a few more constituent inquiries about the status of the review of the off-highway fuel tax exemption program. This seems to have become kind of an on-again, off-again issue for some time since the review began. I wonder if the minister could tell us just what is the current status of the review.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the year 2000 the Business Tax Review Committee was commissioned to do a review of the business taxes in the province. One of their recommendations was to discontinue the rebate portion of the tax-exempt fuel use program and to examine the tax-exempt fuel program in its entirety. Their conclusions were based on that it only benefits some sectors of the economy and certainly because it was complex and difficult to administer.

Subsequent to that, we have undertaken, among the reviews of many programs, to look at these exemption programs, like the tax-exempt fuel use. In January of this year we had a consultation with many industry stakeholders to get their feedback on the program itself. We find that certainly in reviewing it, it does not follow the principles of a low-rate, broad-based tax in Alberta. The claims audited are found to be significantly overstated and poorly supported. It's a problem that we're trying to address with the industry as to what could we do and what should we do to continue to benefit Albertans and industries in particular in providing the best kinds of programs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: considering that there have been some quite valid arguments made promoting the economic development impact of the exemptions, could the minister tell us how that point is being addressed?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. His points mentioned actually are very valid. This program is \$130 million of benefit that allows a forgone tax, that's not having to be paid, and clearly that provides a tremendous benefit to those industries. One of the things we are looking at is how we could simplify the program or how you could even potentially look at options such as lowering the tax rates so that you're not looking for an increase of taxes from the economy in general but lowering the tax rates, broad-based and simpler forms of tax structures versus just this program, which has some complications. The Auditor General actually recommends that we report much more on the benefits and costs of such programs, that we look at forgone revenues as a program and be able to report back. That's part of the review we're doing in trying to examine the economic benefits.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: realizing that this is quite a complex issue, could the minister tell us whether there is a final determination of the outcome of this review in sight?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this stage we've concluded a preliminary review in discussions with industry, a good cross section of the various stakeholders, and we intend to continue that discussion with them. We don't have a complete deadline as far as an established date of completion at this stage. We will work with industry. There won't be any changes to the program without looking to industry and getting their recommendations on how we can improve this program or could we change it for something that would be simpler and better. I do want to reiterate that it's not in our budget for this year. There are no changes contemplated through this year. It will be the ongoing dialogue with industry throughout this year.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I call on the first hon. member to participate in Members' Statements, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'm quite privileged to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Phil Rowe, a councillor from the town of Vegreville and also a volunteer fireman and a person who takes care of many other duties in the community of Vegreville and surrounding area.

AN HON. MEMBER: And a flames fan.

MR. STELMACH: A flames fan, yes. Well, a flames fan because he's a fireman. I'd ask Mr. Rowe to please stand in the members' gallery and all of us to give him a traditional warm welcome to the Assembly.

2:40

head: **Members' Statements**

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

#### **Red Deer Optimist Chiefs Hockey Team**

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without question Alberta is truly a province of champions. I stand in the House today to recognize the tenacious and outstanding efforts of the Red Deer Optimist Chiefs midget triple A hockey club. Yesterday in Bathurst, New Brunswick, in their third game of the Air Canada Cup Canadian national championship, the Optimist Chiefs were down 5-nothing after the first period of play. Other teams may have thought that it was all over but not our Alberta boys. With determined efforts they fought back, and by the end of the second period the score was 5 to 4. Battle bruised and weary against Team Atlantic, the Optimist Chiefs were not willing to admit defeat. The final score of the game was 8 to 6. Red Deer had triumphed once again, and

Team Pacific, the Red Deer Optimist Chiefs, now stand as the only undefeated team in the tournament. They are now looking forward to the opportunity to play in the nationally televised finals on Sunday at 1 p.m. local time on TSN.

The head coach for this team is Dan MacDonald. Dan is an outstanding coach who has the uncanny and dynamic ability to develop his teams to a highly skilled level of play. His talent and technique in transforming these young men into a winning team is the reason behind the team's determination and persistence. Dan would be the first person to tell you that he didn't do it alone. Along with a dedicated team of assistant coaches – Pat Garritty, Jeremy Jablonski, Darcy Loewen, and Brian Pollock – Dan has coached another championship team to their Air Canada Cup. Congratulations also go out to their trainer, Jack Thompson, and the manager, Graham Parsons.

Our heartiest support and congratulations go to the outstanding team members: Kevin Prowse, Kyle Smith, Mart McKnight, Jason Lloyd, Scott Kolinchuk, Jay Rosehill, Mark Smyth, Brennen Francon, Evan Hardy, Dave Kozlowski, Austin Sutter, Derck Pess, Landis Stankieveh, Bill Vandermeer, Parker Burgess, MacGregor Sharp, Dustin Claffey, Steve Stroshin, and Brandon Heatherington. Alberta is proud of you, and we wish you all the best in the Air Canada Cup tournament.

THE SPEAKER: The chair is beginning to wonder if there is anything in Red Deer that is not number one in the world.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

#### **National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week**

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every day we carry within us the possibility that we could save a life. Every day we carry within us the opportunity to transform dying into living. Every day we carry within us the responsibility to consider deeply what we contribute or can contribute to the lives of others.

Mr. Speaker, this is organ and tissue donation week in Canada. Last year more than 100 Canadians died waiting for an organ transplant that never occurred: children needing liver transplants, young mothers needing kidney transplants, men needing heart transplants. The list goes on far too long. Transplants are not just matters of life and death. They can also be matters of restoring sight to people through cataract transplants or freeing people from relentless dependence on dialysis machines or giving a child the chance to grow into a normal, healthy adult.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this Assembly and all Albertans to sign the back of their Alberta personal health care card to indicate their willingness to be organ and tissue donors and to make their wishes clear to family members. Through this simple step we can reduce the suffering and death of other Canadians. Such a small thing to make such a big contribution to the lives of others means that signing your donor card is not a responsibility; it is a privilege.

Thank you.

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

#### **National Soil Conservation Week**

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge National Soil Conservation Week. Soil is one of our most important resources, especially for a province like Alberta, that has such a vibrant agricultural industry, but in order to sustain our industry, we have to ensure that we maintain the quality of our soil. Good-quality soils can reduce farm risks and increase profitability. We need to

stop now and again and consider: what are we doing to protect the soil? April 21 to 27 is National Soil Conservation Week. Organizations from across this country promote the value of soil and preservation of this valuable resource. Soil conservation is particularly important for our province since Alberta contains about 40 percent of the prairie farmland. We are also very diverse, being the only province in Canada with an even distribution of the major soil zones.

Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development has a program to promote and track soil-friendly farming practices through the Alberta environmentally sustainable agriculture program. This program recognizes the long-term sustainability of the agricultural industry and promotes good farming practices such as diverse crop rotations, reduced tillage, and soil conservation.

We've established a network of 43 soil quality benchmarks across the province, the largest active network in Canada. Alberta farmers are consistently improving their farm practices to conserve our important soil resources. We're helping them by developing the science and technologies needed to conserve this valuable resource. By using environmentally sound, sustainable, and soil-friendly farming practices, we are protecting the Alberta advantage in our markets around the world.

I encourage everyone during this week to look down at what lies beneath your feet and ask yourself what you can do to leave a shallow footprint.

Thank you.

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

### **Electricity Deregulation**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Anyone who has received a power bill recently knows that electricity deregulation is an expensive failure. Electricity follows the rules of physics; it does not follow market forces in the conventional sense. This government's electricity deregulation has destroyed Alberta's once cheap and dependable electricity supply, replacing it with price spikes, uncertainty over generation and transmission, windfall profits to power purchasers, and no policy on electricity exports.

Public scrutiny and sound, strong regulations are needed now more than ever as power bills increase. The structure of deregulation actually makes this very difficult to achieve. Consumers and their organizations complain of the difficulty faced when comparing and disentangling financial facts and figures related to their bills. Details related to electricity charged vary even from the same company, depending on the market area. City of Edmonton customers of EPCOR, for instance, have eight line items on their bill while EPCOR customers at Wabamun Lake have 13 line items on theirs.

It's time to standardize the format of power bills across the province so consumers, regardless of where they live, are not in the dark about their charges. The public must have better access to detailed financial information. Open and accountable procedures are needed. With all the confusion this government has created, consumers need monthly statements giving clear and more detailed customer/consumer price information. The government needs to monitor all Power Pool rules and regulatory decisions and investigate any anticompetitive behaviour it finds.

The government promised lower prices, wider consumer choice, and technological advances if retail competition were allowed. Instead, we have expensive deferral payments added to our monthly bills. Electricity needs to be recognized as a service, not an expensive commodity.

Thank you.

### **head: Presenting Petitions**

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and table a petition signed by 76 Edmontonians, most of whom come from the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona, and they're petitioning this Assembly to "urge the government to not delist services, raise health care premiums, introduce user fees or further privatize health care."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### **head: Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 1 and Written Question 2.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday I will move that motions for returns appearing on that day's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

Thank you.

2:50

### **head: Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Premier I'd like to table five copies of a letter sent yesterday from the Premier to the Prime Minister announcing that the governments of all provinces and territories except Quebec have accepted a process to settle disputes under the Canada Health Act proposed by the government of Canada.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate copies of a letter that just reached my office this morning at 8:15. It's a letter that comes from concerned parents of the Foothills school division. The letter is addressed to the MLA for Highwood. These parents are seeking a fair settlement for teachers and adequate school funding to deal with textbook shortages and inadequate classroom conditions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter I received from Solecron, a high-tech company in my riding that has had to make some important decisions in closing their plant, which will result in 490 full-time positions being eliminated and approximately 370 temporary workers being impacted by that decision.

Thank you.

### **head: Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The Official Opposition House Leader. Please proceed.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. May I ask the Government House Leader to share with the Assembly the projected government business for next week?

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader, please.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue next week in Committee of Supply for the main part, but on Monday, April 29, after 9 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders we anticipate in Committee of the Whole dealing with Bill 16, Bill 18, and Bill 24 and in second reading with Bill 26 and thereafter as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, April 30, in the afternoon in Committee of Supply, main estimates for Community Development and as per the Order Paper. Tuesday, April 30, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, the main estimates for the Solicitor General and thereafter Committee of the Whole, bills 19, 29, 24 and second reading on Bill 26 and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, May 1, under Government Bills and Orders in the afternoon, day 21 of Committee of Supply and the Department of Finance and as per the Order Paper. Wednesday, May 1, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply the estimates of Innovation and Science, third reading of Bill Pr. 1, Committee of the Whole on bills 9 and 20, second reading on Bill 26 and as per the Order Paper.

Thursday, May 2, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders, day 23 of Committee of Supply, the estimates for Gaming and as per the Order Paper.

It also might be contemplated, Mr. Speaker, that there would be a motion with respect to the Standing Orders relative to the unanimous consent request that I make every day, and if that motion is ready, I would anticipate that we might deal with it on Monday.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before proceeding, just on the last comment the chair would like to make this as a blanket invitation. Earlier today, Government House Leader, I asked Parliamentary Counsel to consult with the opposition parties with respect to the matter that you had copied on this, and hopefully by Monday there will be general agreement among everyone as to what the intent of that proposed change will be so that we will not have to deal with the daily request with respect to this.

Now, on the request made by the hon. Government House Leader, would all hon. members in favour please say aye.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

head: **Main Estimates 2002-03**

**Learning**

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: As per Standing Orders the first hour is allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other hon. member can participate. The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's with great pleasure that I stand here today to give you the estimates for Learning. The estimates for Learning begin on page 341 of the '02-03 government and lottery fund estimates. Learning's business plan starts on page 291 of the government's budget 2002 document, The Right Decisions for Challenging Times. These estimates further the

excellence in our learning system. They provide support to all Albertans for the achievement of lifelong learning.

With the exception of Health and Wellness my ministry received the largest funding increase of all departments for the '02-03 fiscal year. In '02-03 Alberta Learning plans to increase base program spending by over \$208 million to \$4.7 billion, or a 4.7 percent increase. When you include the increase to opted-out school boards and the special payment of \$46 million provided to the basic learning system as a result of reinvesting teacher job action savings, the total increase is \$261 million. This investment will ensure that we are meeting the needs of students whether they are attending a school or postsecondary institution. Add into the mix \$152 million of opted-out revenue, and you have a total of over \$4.8 billion in funding for learning in this province.

Over the next few months Alberta Learning will be working with the stakeholders to look at the funding framework for basic learning. The purpose of this work is to find ways to simplify or modify the current funding formula while ensuring an equitable distribution of education dollars.

On page 355 of your estimates book operating support to public and separate schools has increased by \$112 million, or 4.0 percent, to over \$2.9 billion. However, when the \$46 million special payment I spoke of earlier is included, this increase is \$158 million, or 5.6 percent.

This budget provides school jurisdictions increased funding to operate their schools and provide a quality education to their students. This increase far exceeds the costs of inflation and enrollment, which are projected at 1.9 percent and 0.25 percent respectively. The basic instruction grant will increase by 3 percent, giving school boards the maximum flexibility to meet their local needs by directing more money to the classroom to improve student learning.

Funding for early childhood services is increasing to \$164 million. Private schools will receive \$60 million in '02-03, an increase of \$2.3 million. This increase relates to increased enrollment and the private school basic instruction grant increase, which is now 60 percent of the public and separate school rate.

This budget also accommodates an expected 10 percent increase in the number of students in grades 1 to 12 with severe disabilities and a 3 percent increase in the severe disabilities grant rate. In keeping with the recommendation from the special education review, the severe emotional/behavioral grant rate will increase by 5.5 percent to provide more equal funding between students with behavioral and nonbehavioral needs. Increased funding for students with mild and moderate disabilities is reflected in the basic instruction grant rate increase of 3 percent.

The upcoming school year will see changes in how we fund grade 10 students. Beginning in September, grade 10 students will be funded on either a full-time or partial program basis. Anyone taking more than 31 credits will be funded at a full-time level, and anyone taking less than that will be funded at a partial program level. These changes will simplify the funding process for grade 10 students. I must emphasize, Mr. Chairman, that this in no way limits the number of credits a grade 10 student can be enrolled in.

Last but not least, under public and separate school support is the student health initiative. The '02-03 fiscal year will see an increase of \$800,000, or 3 percent, to assist with increased costs and demands for services. The initiative assists about 75,000 students who have special health needs with services such as speech, language, or occupational therapy.

Page 348 details how the \$1.1 billion, an increase of \$57 million, or 5.5 percent in '02-03, will be spent on postsecondary institutions, including \$12 million targeted to attract and retain faculty. This \$12

million is on top of the \$28 million provided last year, for a total of \$40 million for faculty retention.

3:00

Alberta's postsecondary system plays a critical role in the preparation of a highly skilled workforce as well as in the creation and application of new knowledge and technology. The government has committed to ensuring that the system can continue to fulfill the role by creating the environment to attract and retain top-quality faculty, talented researchers, and outstanding graduate students. We have also targeted \$100 million, an increase of \$9 million, to maintain expansion seats created within the postsecondary system. Since '99-2000 access to the postsecondary system has been increasing by 4,557 new spaces in high-priority areas such as medicine, nursing, health technology, and information and communication technology programs. In addition, access to apprenticeship training spaces will be enhanced to respond to the growing demand for skilled tradespeople. I might add, Mr. Chairman, that as of today we have reached the 40,000 plateau for apprentices in Alberta, which is the first time that we have ever done that.

Base operational grants will increase through grant adjustments by \$29.3 million, or 3 percent, for universities, colleges, and technical institutions. This increased investment assists postsecondary institutions in keeping tuition fees affordable. Right now across the province tuition fees account for about 24 percent of the cost of a student's education. In addition to improving and expanding the traditional postsecondary-based adult learning opportunities, \$18.9 million will be invested into community-based lifelong learning and family literacy opportunities.

I would like to direct your attention to page 349 entitled Assistance to Learners. The core tenet of student financial assistance remains that the cost of postsecondary education is a shared responsibility between students, their families, and government. Our programs ensure that financial need is not a barrier to further education. In '01-02 the Alberta government provided needs-based student loans and bursaries to more than 46,000 postsecondary learners. The Alberta student loan relief benefit and the loan relief program completion payment will continue to automatically reduce student debt for students in their first and final years of the study program. When a student's combined loan reaches \$5,000 per year, or \$2,500 per semester, any further Alberta student loan assistance is provided as nonrepayable loan relief benefits. In addition, we have increased loan limits to address cost increases including tuition.

In this budget we have also furthered our support for student scholarships. The Jason Lang scholarship has been expanded to award a thousand dollars to students entering their fourth year of study obtaining an 80 percent average in their third year of undergraduate study. In addition, '02-03 will be the first year in which a number of new scholarships are awarded. These include the Earl and Countess of Wessex Edmonton 2001 World Championships in Athletics scholarships and the new apprentice scholarships created through a partnership with industry and government. Also, in partnership with Community Development and in recognition of the Queen's golden jubilee seven new \$5,000 scholarships will be awarded annually starting in 2002-2003. In total, funding for scholarship programs that reward excellence in learning will increase by 10.2 percent to \$32 million in '02-03 and support over 19,000 students.

Overall the '02-03 budget and business plan highlights this government's commitment to lifelong learning facilitated by a seamless system that continues to be affordable for all Albertans. Education is a clear priority for this government, and Budget '02 reflects that commitment.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister for his comments. I'd like to start and raise some questions with respect to the item in the budget that calls for the "design [of] a new funding allocation model that complements the Outcomes Review for Basic Education in consultation with stakeholders." I have a question about that outcomes review. How does the outcomes review and how does a new learning model fit in with the work by the blue-ribbon panel that's going to be appointed under Bill 12? It seems to me that those issues, the outcomes and the funding model, would be items that that blue-ribbon panel might consider. So I wonder if the minister can explain the relationship between those three things.

I'd like to then focus again on the funding model. I look at the funding manual for school authorities that's on-line, and I note that the changes that the minister just outlined for grade 10 still haven't been incorporated on the web site. I assume that's going to happen, but if you go through the allocation manual, you'll notice that a number of items have been singled out: the funding for the teacher assistants program, the early literacy program, the funding for students with severe disabilities, English as a Second Language. Then you go back to the basic instructional grant. Is there a breakdown of what that \$4,239 is intended to cover? I ask the question, Mr. Chairman, because I think it's relevant in terms of trying to determine whether the funding is adequate.

We can see that schools are supposed to use the \$357 allocated per student for mild and moderate children in terms of special needs and for gifted and talented students, so we get a fairly good idea of what that includes. But what does the basic per student grant include? It's a question that again I think would be relevant to the blue-ribbon panel. It's one that I know a number of parents are already addressing by sitting down and looking at their local school and doing an assessment of exactly how much money is needed to operate their school. They're doing that, I know, in at least a couple of cases with a view to trying to look at the school's needs and then to determine if the kinds of resources that are being provided by the local board are adequate. So is there a breakdown? Is there a rationale for that number? How it was determined I guess is really my question.

The minister in his remarks talked about equitable funding. I applaud the government for the work they did in the mid-90s to try and bring about equity across the province. The equities were a problem that had plagued the system for a long time. It was a \$30 million problem. The solution, gathering the dollars and then redistributing them, I think was a partial solution. I say "partial" because I'm not sure that it was based on needs but was rather based on the number of dollars that were available at the time, and that was the way the amount was determined.

3:10

Also, that equity that they tried to achieve I think has been distorted in a couple of ways. One, it's being distorted by fundraising. Children who live in communities where there is a great deal of wealth attend schools where parents are able to provide a host of programs and materials that aren't available to children who live in communities where there is not a similar amount of wealth. There have been inequities that have crept in with respect to the kinds of services that are provided. Not only has the equity been disturbed, but I think the whole question of adequacy is one that – I know it's a question that the Premier continually asks: how much is enough? In answer to that, school jurisdictions elsewhere on the continent have used a variety of methods. I wonder in terms of this

review that's going to be undertaken: will the whole question of adequacy be addressed? Will there be data put forward that indicates that this is what we think is adequate based on these needs? Is the intent in the review to look at what is needed in schools, then to assign to that the kinds of resources that it's felt could meet those needs?

It's not an easy problem, Mr. Chairman. I think it really has been brought to the fore south of the border because of court cases where parents have gone to school districts and to state governments and sued them in the courts on the grounds that the district or the state was not providing adequate resources for the programs that their children needed. I think it's unfortunate that litigation forces problems to be addressed, but I think it's an important problem. I think it's Minnesota that uses an expert panel to try to determine what is adequate. There are some very long and convoluted statistical analyses used by some states, that quite frankly are fairly difficult to follow, to determine what is adequate. I know that there are other states that look at very successful school districts or schools and use those as the measure and say: what kinds of resources would it take to have every school in the state achieve those same kinds of results?

So not one answer to the question of adequacy but certainly a very, very important question and I think one that was raised time and time again in the strikes and the strife that we've had in the schools the last number of months by parents who have really questioned adequacy and failed to understand exactly how their schools are being financed.

I'm pleased that a new funding model is being designed. I am a little worried that the outcomes review – I saw a copy of a couple of pages of some of their work and was really quite surprised at some of the statements that were in the review given that they seem to me to be making decisions that were more appropriately left to Albertans at large about their education system. As I said, I was somewhat surprised by the items that appeared on that list. Again, as you know, we had been arguing for 10 years in the House the notion that there was need for another commission equivalent to the Worth commission, and I guess as close as we're going to come is the blue-ribbon panel.

I have to admit, Mr. Chairman, that I have great hopes for the panel. I think it was a good move by the minister. I think it's long overdue. As I said, I have great hopes for the panel's deliberations. I've been at a couple of public meetings recently where there was some cynicism expressed over whether this was just a way to shuffle problems off to a panel, that it wouldn't have the problems identified and no solutions ever acted upon. I tried to disabuse the members of the groups of that notion. I believe that if you look at the Worth report in the '70s, you can trace directly some of the changes that we enjoy in the school system today to that report. I was looking just the other day at the report. Things like the government is going to be evaluating in this budget, year-round schooling, were first proposed to the province in the early '70s in that report. So, as I said, I'm looking forward to the panel, and I have faith that they can go a long ways to resolving some of the conditions, some of the things that led to the distress in the system in the last year.

If I can move then from that funding item to a couple of more specific questions. There's been some controversy in the news recently about the Alberta home and school association and the funding that they receive from government and concerns from parent councils about the representativeness of the Alberta home and school association and also a concern about the political leanings of that association. Those are legitimate concerns. I guess my question is: what about school councils? They are the legally mandated parent group that the government has put in place, and I wonder if there has

been consideration given to funds for them operate.

It seems to me that that would be a legitimate focus of the government, some way of getting back in a systematic way from school councils that are established I think in virtually every school in the province, getting back from the councils some feedback about the education system. I think it's a bit of a problem. I know that I was contacted by a couple of the parent councils in Calgary, I believe it was, and they wanted to know how they could contact their sister or brother councils, because they had been told at some schools that they couldn't even direct correspondence to the parent councils. I'm not sure it was Calgary. I'm not certain, Mr. Chairman. It was either Edmonton or Calgary.

So I think there's a whole area in terms of school councils, getting feedback from them in some systematic way, ensuring that maybe there are some funds that would help them further their aims, just as there are funds for the Alberta home and school association. As I said, it's not to detract from the work of the Alberta home and school association in any way but to highlight the work of school councils.

If I can move on again, Mr. Chairman, we passed a motion in the House recently from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler to review achievement tests, and I wonder if we could hear from the minister the department's thinking, the department's response. Again I was informed by a parent, someone who had called the department about the achievement tests and the review that was going to be undertaken, and the information they were given was that the achievement tests are always under review. The caller left with the notion that in spite of the concern of this Legislature, there wasn't going to be that wholesale review that I think most of us who voted for that motion expected there to be. So I wonder if the minister could comment on that. I know it's preliminary. It's very early, that motion just having passed the House recently, but I wondered what thinking there has been about the achievement tests.

3:20

Again in the same vein, has there been any consideration to developing and moving towards some diagnostic tests, making some diagnostic tests available to elementary teachers for use in the classroom? I think I've said in each budget or every time we've talked about achievement tests that those tests' greatest value is to the system and to the teacher and to schools. Individual children who write them really don't receive the benefit in terms of any kind of program planning, whereas a diagnostic test would allow a teacher to take and to plan a program based on a youngster's performance on the tests. So I wonder if there's been any thought to diagnostic testing.

I wonder if there's any concern or any work being done in terms of the great distortion that's being made of the achievement test results. They're being used to judge teachers, children, schools, school districts, and even the province. They were never intended for that in the first place. They've moved more and more in that order. There's a local firm that puts out a ranking of the schools on those tests which the firm purports to believe has some relationship to the competency of teachers and a whole host of other things. As someone who was involved in those tests originally, I'm really quite appalled to see the use to which they are being put. I wonder if the concern is one that's shared in the department and if there's been any kind of thinking in terms of what might be done to at least have some of those tests used in an appropriate manner for achievement test results as only being one measure at one point in time of the performance of a particular youngster or a group of youngsters.

I'd like to move then to some of the issues that were raised during the strike. I remember raising the question last year, I believe, or the year before, asking if there could be consideration given to a

performance measure in terms of class size. Mr. Chairman, I've been, I guess, a little concerned. I've tried through a number of private member's bills, which never seem to get debated, motions, which again are – I think one was debated and then defeated. I've tried time and time again to draw attention to the importance of class size, and I've been accused of wanting very rigid class sizes, where the school target would be 17. If they had 18 students, they'd have to split it into nine, and that is certainly a distortion of anything that I've proposed to this Assembly, but I think it's important. I think the money that was spent in Edmonton on the study, the \$500,000 – it's an important measure. It's an important measure to parents. I think that if you heard nothing during the strike, it's an important measure to parents, and certainly it's an important measure for teachers. I wonder, with all of the measures that we have in the business plan, why we couldn't have a performance measure indicating class sizes. It's information that I think the government gathered at least once, and it would make sense to gather that information on a regular basis to see where class sizes are going.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon. minister, would you like to respond?

DR. OBERG: He doesn't want me to respond yet, so go ahead.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to participate in the debate on the estimates for one of the most important departments of the government of Alberta: the Ministry of Learning. I want to certainly say to the minister that he carries on his shoulders a very heavy responsibility. It's a ministry that handles both the basic education level, K to 12, and then a large postsecondary system, which serves the needs of adult learners in a variety of ways. This population is very diverse, and so is of course the population at the basic education level, diverse not only in terms of age cohorts but diverse in terms of needs, abilities, capacities, whether these are financial or capacities directly related to learning and learning preferences.

It's indeed a very diverse universe of Albertans who participate in and benefit from this ministry, and the size of the provincial budget speaks to both the extensive nature of the ministry's responsibilities and the growing needs of the society, economy, and individuals and families. This is a system that because of rapid changes in society and rapid changes in the economy is experiencing rapid changes within the system. Those changes deal with both expectations and reciprocal relationships between the different actors of the ministry, on the one hand, and institutions and the educators, the people who deliver educational services, on the other, school boards, responsible for general day-to-day administration and management of school systems. The same is true of course at the postsecondary level, although it seems to me that the degree of autonomy that is enjoyed by the governing bodies as well as the institutions in the postsecondary system seems to be higher and more readily respected by the minister than is the case with the K to 12.

When I talk about autonomy, I obviously am aware of the recent difficulties that the ministry and the minister experienced in its and his relationships with our teachers over the last year. It's unfortunate that that has come to be. The point is that it's a challenge that needs to be addressed, addressed honestly, openly, and effectively so that we can return to a more normal situation in these relationships. The minister is attempting to do his part. I wonder if there are special provisions in the budget that'll help him address some of these challenges.

There's clearly a dispute. The minister takes one view of the question of whether our K to 12 system is adequately funded. Parents, teachers, school boards, many of them, take the opposite view, a different view. It's not a matter that should simply be reduced to taking shots politically at each other. It's a real issue. There is a question of perceptions. There are questions of positions, and those positions are different, quite different, and if the distance between those positions isn't reduced by effective action, then the tensions and the problems, I'm afraid, will continue. So I wonder if the minister would address this first general question as to how the way this budget makes provisions for the K to 12 will help him from his side to allay some of the concerns and the problems that have been with us at least for a year.

3:30

The 4 and 2 formula that was used last year by the minister to include as a line item the direction to school boards with respect to teachers' salaries was clearly at the root of the teacher dispute with the minister and with the ministry. I'd like to ask him how, with the continuation of that 4 and 2 into the next year, he is going to be able to address and alleviate the tensions and the conflict which certainly broke into the open as symbolized in the existence now in this province of a law which in our judgment is punitive, and the teachers have seen it that way. So that's one general question.

I have another specific question. The issues over which there is some consensus between the ministry, the school boards, and the teachers as to what those issues are deserve a study, merit a study. There are specific questions to the minister with respect to this commission or blue-ribbon panel. I don't know what it's going to be. Exactly when will this commission be named? I urge him to do it as soon as possible. So if he can give us a date by which it will be named and working. Secondly, is there in the budget that's proposed here a provision for funding the activities of this commission, and what is that budget estimate? There's no indication here. The commitment was made, I guess, after the budget was finalized, so the minister will hopefully provide some supplementary information on it.

The question was raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods with respect to the Alberta home and school association. I read something in the paper a week ago or last week. I can't remember the exact date. My question is about the dollar funding for the home and school association. What is it, and which item does it come out of in the budget? So how much is it, and is there a performance measure here which tells us whether or not dollars spent on that are well spent?

I had one other question. It has to do again with high school students. It's about a performance measure. This is outcome 3.4: "Learners are well prepared for citizenship." The targets there, achievement measures, performance measures, are spectacularly low for high school students when you compare them with other measures on the same page or on the pages relating to performance. Why is it that we expect from our high school students or from the institutions no more than 48, 49 percent? This is page 299 in the business plan.

I'm curious about this. To me it's setting the bar far too low. To me citizenship outcomes are extremely important at the level of a high school learning experience. These students are approaching voting age. They will be becoming full participants in political decision-making. Two concerns here: one is the low level of expectation here as reflected in these performance measures, and the second has to do with the definition, the conception, or the notion of citizenship in the first place. How narrowly does it get defined so that it can be measured? Are there effective ways of measuring

citizenship, and are the measures in fact first premised on a certain notion of citizenship? I'm not sure if we have a clear enough idea here that we are serious about measuring citizenship-related outcomes, and if so, what are the most effective measures, and what are the levels of expectations that are reflected in these measures?

So those are a few of the specific questions. Now I want to turn to the grade 10 student funding formula that the minister has just referred to in his introductory remarks. This morning we learned that there are serious questions being raised by the Edmonton public school board, but my suspicion is that this concern isn't limited to one school board; that is, the Edmonton public school board. It's a policy that will have an impact on school boards across the province, although during question period when the minister did decide to answer one of the three questions posed to him related to this, he kind of seemed to suggest that he has probably been driven to this decision by the problems that he sees or hears about or has learned exist just within one school board, which is the Edmonton public school board. So that certainly was the sort of edge to the answer to the question.

It is a problem that's going to arise that you're going to have to address. I want you to take some time and tell us how it's not a cap. You agreed just a few weeks ago that capping was the wrong way to go. If you tie funding to a certain number of credits which are less than the average presently being the norm, then clearly it has to be seen as an attempt to cap. The credits are the resources available to school boards to meet their obligations, particularly obligations to students who seem to be the best students in the system, the ones who take extra credits or IB students or high academic level students, most of them. Certainly that is an issue again you might want to address in some detail and say why it is that you think the formula that was used will not first lead to loss of revenues or funding to school boards and, secondly, why it will not discourage school boards from continuing the whole wide variety of offerings of these courses. They may simply roll back what they offer in order to deal with this, because after all you need teachers and instructors in order to carry on with the present array of offerings.

3:40

Some other questions here quickly. With these now I shift to the postsecondary level, Mr. Chairman, and I want to draw the attention of the minister to some of the targets. I'm now referring to the strategies, Mr. Minister, on page 296 of the business plan: outcome 1.3, outcome 1.4, accessibility and affordability at the postsecondary level. The commitments made here, the outcomes expected are laudable. "Financial need is not a barrier to learners participating in learning opportunities"; no one can disagree with that, a good outcome expectation. "All Albertans can participate in quality learning," and I emphasize "all Albertans."

Now, some of the things that I've been hearing from students – and you have been meeting with them too, I understand, some postsecondary students – draw attention to some serious concerns that postsecondary student organizations – CAUS I guess is one of them – have about both accessibility and affordability related to financial need. The document that I am referring to here is the Council of Alberta University Students, February 2002, Alberta Tuition Policy: Ensuring Affordability, Accountability, Accessibility, Predictability, and Quality. That's the title of it. The document notes – and these are facts; I guess we would all agree with the facts at least – that since 1991-92 tuition has increased by 209 percent. In other words, it's tripled, the third highest tuition fee overall in the country. The University of Alberta stands to have the highest arts and sciences tuition fees. The average student debt in the province is \$18,000 and growing.

Students have concerns about the maximum loans that are allowed to them. Now, some of the surveys cited in this study refer to an Ipsos-Reid study done for Alberta Learning which shows that 44 percent of recent Alberta high school students not attending postsecondary institutions cite already high tuition and mandatory fees as a reason for not attending and also cite Stats Canada 2001 report that the aggregate amount of outstanding student loans was 6.2 times higher in '92 than it was in 1984.

One other study here, Mr. Chairman, that I want to draw the minister's attention to – I'm sure he is familiar with these studies and references and numbers – Degrees of Opportunity: Examining Access to Postsecondary Education in Alberta, the University of Alberta Senate study cited in the study that I mentioned above by CAUS. Eighty-eight point six percent of students believe that students from middle- and high-income brackets are more likely to attend university than those from low-income brackets.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

#### head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Dr. Ed Silver and his wife, Maxine, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. Dr. Silver is a professor and holds the Carma chair in the Faculty of Management at the University of Calgary. After a distinguished career in which he has developed a worldwide reputation in the field of operations management, Dr. Silver is looking forward to his retirement later this year. He is visiting today with a former student; that is, our Clerk, Dr. David McNeil. I would like to ask Dr. and Mrs. Silver to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

#### head: **Main Estimates 2002-03**

##### **Learning** (continued)

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To start off with, I will reassure the members of the opposition that any question I do not touch on in my comments will be given to you in writing at a later date, if that's all right. My staff will go through *Hansard* and provide you with the answers.

First of all, if I may start with the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and then essentially go backwards. With regard to the tuition policy, we are presently in talks with the universities, postsecondary institutions, and the student groups to come up with a new tuition policy. As the hon. member knows, the existing tuition policy is that the tuition rise can occur up until around \$250 per student to a maximum of 30 percent of the operating expenses. Mr. Chairman, we are presently at 24 percent. However, in two institutions in the province we are at 30 percent, and it is becoming very evident that we have to have a new tuition policy in place. I anticipate that over the next two to three weeks we may well have a new tuition policy. It will be brought forward pending the agree-



ment of the parties that I talked about – namely CAUS, ACTISEC, and the postsecondary institutions – but I will assure the hon. member that that is under discussion at the moment.

The next point that I want to draw to his attention is the support to postsecondary learners. Indeed, as one of the items that is in the budget, it shows a 12 and a half percent increase to support for postsecondary learners. Mr. Chairman, that's on top of 22 percent last year and 22 percent the year before. So in total we have increased the support to postsecondary learners by 56 percent over the past three years, which is certainly substantial.

The other thing that I want to reassure the hon. member on is that there are a lot of kids, as I mentioned in my opening comments, 46,000, who benefit from student assistance every year and that we do look at all exceptions. There are appeal mechanisms that are available.

The next question I will get into is about the grade 10 formula. The first question and probably the easiest question, if I may, is the why. Quite simply, the Auditor General said that there were abnormalities in the way CEUs were being reported. There were abnormalities in CTS funding in the last Auditor General's report. In keeping with the Auditor General's report, we have looked into it, and we have decided that, not exclusively in Edmonton although there have been some issues in Edmonton, there have been jurisdictions that have, for example, an average number of credits in grade 10 of 47. That varies down to a low of around 32 or 33 in other jurisdictions. Mr. Chairman, that changes directly the amount of funding that these jurisdictions do. I will say from the outset – and I think that this is a very important statement that I'm about to make – that these school jurisdictions are in no way cheating. Quite simply, they are working within our rules. It is our rules that are wrong. This is something that the Auditor General paid close attention to when he gave us his warning.

3:50

The reason we did grade 10 first of all is because to the age of 16 kids have to be in school. Where there become issues is when you get part-time students taking, for example, 10 or 15 or 20 credits. How do we fund those students? With our partners in education, with the school superintendents, with the school boards, the ASBA, the ASBOA, the home and school association, the Francophone boards, we will be sitting down in an attempt to come up with a new funding formula that will take into consideration all of the issues that have been raised, including the Auditor General's report. So again, Mr. Chairman, it is very important.

I will also just raise one very interesting point, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark raised this point to me shortly before. It was that prior to CEU funding, dollars were distributed to the schools on the basis of 36.5 credits per year. That is how the moneys were distributed in Edmonton public. We are now funding, if it were on a credit basis – and it is not on a credit basis – the equivalent of around a little over 40 credits per year being put out. I will say, though, that I do not want to call it on a credit basis, because we are in no way limiting the number of credits that a student can take. It is roughly \$5,000, which is \$600 more than the same student would be funded in grade 9. We are also looking at a new way to fund the system, whether it's sparsity and distance or growth and density. We're bringing our partners in. We're sitting down and attempting to come up with a new way to distribute the dollars. Mr. Chairman, I feel that this is an extremely important thing to do.

On the comment about citizenship, on page 299, I entirely agree with the hon. member. I agree that these targets are wrong, and I will change the targets for the next budget year. I think that having

a target of 48 percent for high school students does not say very much for our high school system. I entirely agree with the hon. member and will ensure that this is changed for our next business plan. Thank you to him for pointing this out to me.

With regard to the home and school association funding, this year they will receive \$300,000. It will rise to \$400,000 next year, \$500,000 the year after, and then start coming down to \$400,000 and \$300,000 over the next five years. The reason why we funded the home and school association is that they are a provincial body that encompasses from the southern border to the northern border, from the eastern border to the western border. They have some 550 school councils and are as close to a provincial organization as there is when it comes to home and school councils. This is a very important group. It is a way of getting parents involved, and it's a way of hearing parents' voices. They have had an active seat at all of our discussions, an active seat at the table, and we feel that it is necessary to support them in the same way that we support the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and many other associations that are out there. Again, they have given us a pledge that they will be raising their own money, and as they do that, our funds will start decreasing.

The next question was about the commission and when it will be named. It will be named as quickly as we can. One of the key components of the document that was signed on Friday was that there would be input from the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta School Boards Association into terms of reference, committee members, things like that. We have been unable to do it until that was signed. I will say that for the two weeks of negotiations that were taking place, I do apologize to the House and the members, but we were dragging our feet because we knew that this would be a very integral part of that agreement, and for that reason it has not been named up until this date. We will now, however, endeavour to get members on it as quickly as we can. We hope to have a start date of June 1. That is typically what we are aiming for, and I see nothing to dissuade me from keeping on that time line.

The budget numbers. The hon. member is absolutely right: this was something that was conceived after the budget. We did not know the budget numbers exactly. It is from within our existing budget. We will not be back for supplementary estimates or anything like that. It will be from within our existing budget, probably our communications budget, but we will look at that.

The funding framework. The hon. member raised some good questions about the concerns about funding and also, I believe, about the per student funding. One of the endeavours that we do is attempt to distribute the dollars that are available in an equitable fashion, and what that means quite simply is that people in Northland school division, for example, that are far north, that have small school sizes of four and five students or 10, 15 students, obviously have more costs to provide an education to their students than someone in downtown Edmonton or downtown Calgary purely by means of distance. I think that's just common sense. We need to determine though: are our sparsity and distance formulas correct? Is there a better way to provide a proxy, because that's what we're doing, for how to distribute these dollars?

The CEU issue, that the Auditor General raised, I've already raised in here, and it's something that needs to be addressed. There are some very difficult issues there, and we need to talk about it. We need to find out how these dollars are being distributed. Growth and density: all of these are very important issues and will certainly be discussed.

To get to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, again he had some questions about the funding formula and the outcomes review. I will say that those are two distinct reports. With the

outcomes review what I anticipate doing is not tying that to funding but instead tying it to the ability of the school boards to decrease their paperwork. Where I'm going with this is that we have to have some reward to school boards for having a positive outcome. There has to be some benefit to school boards for having a positive outcome. The enigma in all of this is that if the school board does well and you give them more money, then potentially they're going to do better because they have more resources. Likewise, a school board that does not do as well can do worse. You can't really take away money for doing well, so what we anticipate doing – this has not been finalized yet, and I will say that I have not seen the outcomes review, as I'm waiting for it to be finalized – is rewarding school boards by saying: "You guys are doing a really good job. We're going to get out of your hair. We're not going to make you fill in all these papers. As long as you continue on the outcome side of things, continue to get good results, continue to get exemplary results, we'll stay out of your hair, and we'll concentrate on those school boards that need the help." The people from my department, that are very, very good at what they do, will then help the school boards that truly need the help and stay out of the reporting, the red tape, the bureaucracy of the school boards that don't. So that is the general direction that we're going in.

The other comment I'll make about outcomes review is that it will be tied in directly to the blue-ribbon panel in that they will see the results of this outcomes review that has been going on for the past two years, and they will get that as a document.

The review of the funding formula. I talked about it a little bit, the breakdown of the per student grant and what it is expected to cover. One of the huge issues that we have with the Alberta school boards is the whole issue of flexibility, Mr. Chairman. The school boards, since they lost their right to tax, have continually requested us not to envelope dollars, because they say – and I believe rightfully so – that if we envelope the dollars, then realistically why do we need the school boards? Subsequently, what is included in the per student grant is the flexibility that we give the school boards to make the local decisions, to make the very important local decisions. It is included in those per student grants. How large the classes are is one of the issues. How many teachers? How many textbooks? Where are all these funds being spent? I don't think that I should tell the school boards how to allocate those dollars. I believe it's the school board's job. It's the school board that has to be accountable for doing that, and we will continue to ensure that accountability.

I believe I've mentioned to a small degree the equity of the funding formula. Again I'll comment that that's something that's extremely important. We need to look at each and every grant and find out if they are being equitable. Over the past three years, since I've been minister, I've probably made seven to 10 exceptions in the sparsity and distance issues, so when I start making that many exceptions, then we know there has to be something done, because the formula obviously isn't meeting the needs of a lot of the areas. So we are going to be dealing with the very difficult questions of how you distribute the dollars, what is the best formula to distribute the dollars. Again, I will give a pledge to the hon. members that it will be done not from my department alone; it will be done with the partners in education to determine how these will be allocated.

4:00

I've talked about the home and school association.

Motion 505, the review of the achievement tests. Absolutely, we review the achievement tests all the time. I will reiterate, though, that achievement tests are probably the most significant way we have of checking our curriculum to make sure that our curriculum is doing the right job. I feel strongly about that. I will not apologize

for that. I believe it's one of the things that has made Alberta the number one education system in the world. I will not back away from the achievement test. If there is a better way to do it, absolutely we'll look at it. As a matter of fact, I think one of the issues that we have to look at is whether or not we can use these tests as a predictor of a child's ability. Again, I don't know that, but these are some of the things that we're looking at. How can we use these tests for even more information than what we have now? Can we predict by using them – and that's a question: can we? – whether a child will succeed later on in their grades or not? These are some of the very important questions.

Again, I'll just finish up here by agreeing with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods about the distortion of school testing results. I do not agree with that. I do not condone it. No one in my department condones it, because quite simply what is happening is that these results are being used for someone's own means, their own methods, and are in no way endorsed by my department. The achievement tests are there to improve the system. They're there to get better results from the students, and that's something that this minister and this government believe strongly in. I cannot say what we can do about it other than what I've done already, and each and every time these rankings come out, I speak against them in public. I will continue to do that because I do not agree with it. As the hon. member has alluded to, it is but one point in time that is measured, and you cannot measure a student purely by that one point in time.

I will say one other thing though – and this is something that is very important – about the acceptance and credibility of the achievement tests. First of all, our people who make achievement tests are not people that we just pick up off the street and say: gee, why don't you make a test for grade 3s? These people – and I'm not exaggerating when I say this – eat, sleep, dream, and do everything about tests seven days a week, 365 days a year. Quite literally, they are obsessed with testing, and I thank them.

AN HON. MEMBER: They should be seeing someone.

DR. OBERG: They should get a life. But they do a fabulous job, and our achievement tests are second to none in the world. That's something that we always have to remember when it comes to that.

The other point that I will make is that 90 percent of teachers utilize the grade 9 achievement test as part of their student marks, 80 percent utilize the grade 6 achievement test for part of their student marks, and 70 percent of grade 3s utilize the grade 3 achievement test as part of the final mark. That is purely the teachers' choice. Again, as opposed to diploma exams, it's purely voluntary that these teachers have chosen to do so, and I think it's an excellent point.

I will reiterate that if there are any questions that I've missed, we will search through *Hansard* and give the results in writing. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to join the debate of the budget for the Department of Learning today. I will try to keep my comments very brief because I have had a chance to provide input to the budget before. However, I want to focus the attention of the minister on the issue of funding for ESL students. I have been hearing for many years now that we have a severe problem of underfunding for ESL students. I have spent quite some time researching this issue, and it turned out that very clearly we as a government provide enough money for ESL students. However, the way that the money is being spent by the school boards is very questionable.

As all of us know, we provide what is called the basic instructional grant for every student who attends the system. For every ESL student we also provide a top-up grant. In Calgary, for example, I am aware that the school board spends the top-up ESL grant on ESL programs but spends almost nothing from the basic instructional grant on ESL students. An ESL student, for example, takes 70 percent ESL classes and 30 percent regular classes. In that case what he should have been receiving for the ESL program is the ESL top-up grant plus 70 percent of the basic instructional grant to make it fair, but the school board does not use that practice. Because of that, for the past many, many years ESL funding has always been underfunded and has caused significant problems for this population of students.

Many parents of ESL students also have asked me to ask the minister to support funding ESL for kindergarten students as well because many kindergarten students do have ESL problems, and because of that, they require this support. It is consistent with our policy to do early intervention whenever possible to help students achieve their full potential.

Another thing that they would like the ministry to look at doing is setting up a curriculum for ESL programs from K to 9. Presently we have an ESL curriculum for grades 10 to 12, but we have nothing for K to 9 at all, and because of that, there is inconsistency. Also, they question whether the students get the value for the time that they spend in the ESL programs.

Those are the points that I would like to bring to the minister's attention, and I look forward to his response.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. I commend the hon. member for bringing these issues forward. First of all, ESL is a very important part of the education system. As a matter of fact, one of the first things that we did in our first budget was remove the cap on ESL so that each and every student is funded who is in ESL. The hon. member has an excellent point in that there is a top-up rate, and I believe it's around \$750 per student on top of the roughly \$4,300 that is in the per-student grant. He's absolutely right in stating that we give those dollars in a bulk amount to the school board, and how the school board distributes those dollars is part of the flexibility that I had talked about previously, Mr. Chairman.

I will certainly endeavour to take the issues that the hon. member has raised to the school boards, because I believe it's probably not just a Calgary school board issue. There are other school boards that have very similar issues, and I will certainly take that forward.

With regards to K to 9 and the ESL curriculum, we are presently working on K to 9 for an ESL curriculum as well. The hon. member has an excellent point in that.

Just to summarize, I believe that what the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose has brought up are very important issues in his riding, and I will endeavour to do as much as I can as minister to ensure that these are followed through. I have been in that area of Calgary, but not in his specific riding, at some of the ESL schools, and I will commend the teachers and the staff for the challenges that they have. I will also add one other commendation, and that is to the students. I have never seen more attentive students, and when you consider that they have been speaking English for maybe only two or three months, the results that these kids are achieving are absolutely amazing. I would invite any member of the Assembly who wants to visit our ESL programs to take a look at that, because it is truly exceptional what is happening in our classrooms.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I will certainly take the hon. member's issues forward, and I would invite the hon. member to go with me to

some of the schools. I'd be more than happy to talk to the parents that have raised these issues as well.

4:10

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss with the minister today and through written responses in the future a number of issues. I'm sure that I will be raising some of the same issues that other people have mentioned as well.

I would like to first of all begin by addressing the mission statement here. Actually, I think the mission statement for this department is pretty good. Some of the departments have mission statements that I question or take issue with, but this one I think is probably about as good as mission statements are going to get in this kind of an area. I'm going to read it into the record here.

Alberta Learning's leadership and work with stakeholders build a globally recognized lifelong learning community that enables Albertans to be responsible, caring, creative, self-reliant and contributing members of a knowledge-based and prosperous society.

I think that's a commendable mission. While we're on that sort of a comment, in going through the principles, there's the odd word that I take issue with, but I am reassured that there is a section under goal 3 that specifically addresses the importance of citizenship. I think that that's crucial in a time when people are more and more regarding themselves or being regarded by others as, say, customers or as economic units or producers and so on, all of which of course is important. Ultimately, I'd prefer to think of Albertans as citizens first and as producers or consumers or customers or whatever else second. So I do appreciate and take some comfort in the focus on citizenship here in the goals.

My questions go all over the place. Some of them will reflect the fact that the University of Alberta is in my constituency and is the largest educational institution in the province and in fact one of the largest in the country. It will also reflect the fact that I have a large number of elementary and junior high schools in my constituency. I think I've been to all of them now as an MLA, and I've listened to many of the concerns.

Starting on page 303 of the business plan, I notice the support for adult learning line under expenses at the top of the page. The expenditures forecast for last year were \$1,183,880,000, and there's a 6.3 percent increase, as I calculate it, for this year. You know, there are always trade-offs. People always want more, and there's never enough to meet every need. I don't have the figures here to adjust that 6.3 percent for changes in enrollment and inflation, but it's probably a workable sort of number year by year, although there are going to be some issues I raise in a minute questioning that.

My bigger concern is over the four-year interval from the forecast expenditure for last year up to the target for 2004-2005. Over four years, if my calculations are right, that's about a 12 percent increase, which works out over the four years to an average of 3 percent a year. I'm concerned that that is not going to be sufficient to keep the system going on a strong basis once inflation and population growth and so on are adjusted for. [interjection] Okay. The minister can explain the figures to me.

In any case, moving to some more specific issues here. There are questions and concerns – and they've come up at other times; the minister, I'm sure, will have an answer or an explanation from his perspective on them – around faculty development and retention in the universities, and that is a particular concern in my constituency. There's tremendous competition for top-notch researchers and teachers at postsecondary institutions, and the University of Alberta's ranking in terms of its faculty salaries is – I'm not sure of the

figure off the top of my head, but it's not at the top of the ranks nationally. That issue gets brought to my attention.

I know that the government has funded a faculty retention program, but if I'm looking at the figures correctly, there is a drop in that budget. [interjection] Okay. My information may be wrong, and again the minister can explain that to me, so we'll get to that. It's certainly a priority concern for the province as a whole and for my constituency to ensure that we have the resources to attract and hold strong faculty for universities. There are, as I say, universities not just across Canada but around the world competing for the leaders in business – we had a business professor as a visitor here earlier this afternoon – in medicine, in fact in every area of postsecondary education. So I'll be interested in getting more information from the minister specifically on that issue.

Tuition fees, again an issue the minister is well aware of. It will crop up all the time as an area of concern, and I have some sympathy with students here, reflecting back on the tuition fees that I paid and what they're expected to pay now. There has been a dramatic increase, and the student organizations put out information that the rise in tuition fees in Alberta over the last decade has been, I believe, the highest among all 10 provinces. So there are ongoing concerns, and I do express these concerns as a way to bring them to the attention of the minister, once again, in terms of his budgeting exercises, the need to ensure that tuition remains affordable and is not a barrier to education.

Postsecondary institutions and schools across this province are turning more and more to business partnerships, and that raises all kinds of concerns. We've all heard debates in this Assembly and read concerns in the media over the grocery store high that may be developed in Edmonton, and I also hear concerns about business partnerships from the universities and the colleges, not just from faculty but indeed from communities surrounding, for example, the University of Alberta and community members who have raised questions about plans that the University of Alberta has for the University farm on the south side and the possibility that that can be developed through a series of business/university partnerships into a very substantial business park.

There are several different issues here. One of course is the chronic worry from faculty and from the public that businesses bringing funding to research projects and university programs will influence the research that's done or the nature of the teaching that's done or the nature of the facilities. I think that's a reasonable concern to have. It returns in some ways to my interest in citizenship, that we are all here as free citizens. The same kind of issue arises with the potential partnerships with schools and what signals, what messages we are sending to our students.

Now, the reason I raised that in a debate on estimates and budgets is that these organizations are turning to business partnerships because they feel constrained by their budgets either on the capital side or on the operating side, and I think that in some ways it's more on the capital side than on the operating side. So I would be interested in what information the minister might be able to provide on policies his department may have on the kinds of partnerships that educational institutions may get into with businesses. Are there any parameters or limitations on those kinds of partnerships?

4:20

This also raises a question that's very sensitive in my constituency around a particular section of the Universities Act that allows universities to be free of the zoning controls of municipalities. This has been a controversial practice at the University of Alberta in a handful of cases where the university has actually purchased what are by most of our measures commercial properties – and I'm

thinking right now of College Plaza, for example, which is a huge apartment and office complex – and then has leased those back to private operators, and the private operators find themselves suddenly freed of all municipal zoning constraints. I do share the concerns of the people living in those areas that suddenly they're faced with a situation where a private developer can proceed with any kinds of plans free of municipal controls. Again the universities will argue that their financial constraints have driven them to this. I'm not sure that that's an entirely fair explanation, but that's why I raise it here in budget debates. I believe the Universities Act is up for review in the next year or two, and I think this will be an area of real concern. Any reflections the minister may already have on that I would be interested in, and I know that my constituents and the universities would be interested as well.

As well as being the health critic I'm the critic for aboriginal issues, and the minister of aboriginal affairs has exchanged information with me. I do want to reiterate to the minister a point that I also brought to his attention in Public Accounts yesterday. We are facing in the next 10 to 20 years an enormous challenge in meeting the needs of aboriginal students, and the time to be planning for that is now. We need to be adjusting our programs or anticipating that influx and the challenge that that influx will present to our school system now so that we're not caught by surprise. So any comments the minister has on that I would appreciate.

My colleague, my seatmate here, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, will be interested in my next comments given her ongoing concern for the rights and opportunities available to women. I am coming to the conclusion that we may need to pay special attention in our education system to opportunities for boys and men, and looking at the makeup of this Legislature right now, I'll get a lot of sympathy for that, I hope. I am genuinely concerned that with universities, for example, there's a very clear trend over the long term of a decline in the percentage of students who are males. I think 42 percent of students at university are male, and there's no sign of that long-term decline decreasing. There are also concerns that boys in school are not doing as well as girls, and there's a long-term trend there.

In fact, this first came to my attention when I was studying in Britain several years ago, and there was widespread concern in Britain that the emphasis on opening opportunities for girls had in many ways meant that the special needs of boys had been overlooked and that this was part of a culture that had developed in British schools that explained some of the bullying and roughness and hooliganism that you see in British schools. This was actually a subject of serious public debate in Britain. I would like the minister to consider, whether it's in this budget or in future budgets, this issue. It's easy to joke about it, but in fact I think that in the long term we do need to ensure that the opportunities for all students, regardless of their gender, are rich and inviting.

Moving on to another topic here, in our economy in Alberta the demand for apprentices is enormous. At the same time, I have heard concerns that the apprenticeship programs at NAIT are not expanding at the rate that one would expect. I don't have that information with me here, but I may be able to obtain it, or the minister may well be aware of it. There are in NAIT's plans – and I've seen the documents – suggestions that their focus on the traditional apprenticeship programs is flattening out, and it seems to me that this is a time when we should be looking at expanding those.

Along a similar line of specific training I again re-emphasize a theme on health that I've been hammering away on the last several days in question period: the need to ensure an abundant supply of health professionals, including ultrasound technicians, all kinds of technicians, RNs, LPNs. There has been debate on this point in the

House. Frankly, looking ahead to the affordability of our health care system, one of the ways to help its affordability is to flood the market with qualified staff so that we can keep the system functioning well.

Moving back to the universities again, I'll just reiterate a couple of concerns that I do hear. One is around capital funding and infrastructure, the infrastructure deficit that especially the University of Alberta as the province's oldest university is feeling. The size of that deficit by their figures now is – I think it's in the hundreds of millions of dollars. They're very concerned about the deterioration of their physical infrastructure. [interjection] Okay; so it's over \$200 million. I was aware of that general figure. We run that infrastructure down at our own long-term risk, and I'm sure the minister is aware of that, but I would like that to be considered in the budget planning here.

There are also of course operating funding concerns at the universities. The University of Alberta has implemented an enrollment cap as one way of dealing with that, and they are also looking at deficit financing. I am concerned that the university's plans to go into a short-term deficit for a couple of years and then pull themselves out of that is a risky, risky plan, and I'm concerned that we may be looking at the university getting into chronic deficit financing, which worries me.

I will also mention concerns that parents have brought to me. I think the minister has indicated that he will meet with some of the parents, but it's worth getting on the record that there is profound concern among parents at some schools in my constituency over the pressure they feel to fund-raise. This is an issue the minister gets challenged with repeatedly, but I need to repeat it here. I've met with the parents, and they are just feeling squeezed to the point of throwing up their hands and surrendering on this particular issue, and as I walk through the schools and I notice the condition of the buildings, I can sympathize with the parents. There is one school in my constituency in particular that is in a serious state of disrepair, and despite the building quality rehabilitation program I am seeing students in my constituency who are going to schools that are in poor condition.

Finally – I'm running out of time here – along those lines I'll repeat a concern that the minister hears, but it's a budget concern. Parents and schools feel at a loss at how to handle the demands with the curriculum for computers and technological equipment when they don't feel the budget is there to provide that equipment to them. That relates of course to the issue I mentioned a moment ago of fund-raising. It's not clear to me at this moment what the department and minister's plans are for budgeting for computers and technology in schools, how that is sorted out. Any information he can provide and any reassurance he can provide to parents that that will be sorted out would be much appreciated.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:30

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. minister, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The hon. member has raised a lot of questions here, and again I'll attempt to go through as many as I can, but we will provide written answers. I'll start by going backwards, if I may.

Technology in schools. Last year, as the hon. member knows from Public Accounts, we put in \$60 million, and it was prorated over the next three years. I will add, though, that one of the important things that we're looking at in the learning system is how to evergreen the computers, how to ensure that we continue to have computers, and whether or not it's contracts, whether or not it's

service contracts. These are some of the issues that we are grappling with right now. We do not have a solution to it, but it is very important, and I will assure the hon. member that we are looking at it. When we first started putting computers in schools, back to the 283s, I don't think anyone envisioned the growth of these computers and how it would occur that basically every three years you need a new computer. So we are looking at how we can do that. We're looking at potential opportunities. I will add one other comment. One of the things that I find distressing is that teaching staff is actually being used to service the computers, and I don't think that, first of all, that's a good use of teaching staff, but second of all, it's not their expertise. We need to find a way around this.

The fund-raising. Absolutely, we have to look at this as issues. I continue to hear it. I will send the hon. member a copy – and it's not included in the budget – of the actual amount of fund-raising that occurs in the province of Alberta. As I said in Public Accounts yesterday and as the Auditor General confirmed, we still have a ways to go on accurately reporting the amount of dollars that are fund-raised. Last year it was \$64 million, and we have the breakdown of how those dollars were spent and how they were raised. I'll make sure that the hon. member gets a copy of that.

Deficit funding for the universities. Mr. Chairman, no university can run a deficit without my permission. What they will have to do if they choose to run a deficit is they will have to have a very good payback plan. I will not allow the universities to deficit away their future. So I'll give that assurance to the hon. member.

Capital funding. Although it is not in my department – it is now in Infrastructure – I do have part of the approval process, and I just want to say two things on this. First of all, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure is well aware of the capital backlog that is out there on the operation of the buildings, and he is coming up with a plan on how to deal with that. Again, I believe – I believe – that there was an increase in the funding component for the maintenance of the buildings, the postsecondary institutions.

One other thing I will add, though. One of the benefits of coming into this ministry when I did three years ago is that there were no cranes on the postsecondary institutions, and now almost every institution we look at around the province, there are cranes. There are buildings going up, whether it's NAIT, whether it's SAIT, whether it's Mount Royal, whether it's the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, or the University of Lethbridge. All of these institutions are building new buildings, and I think that that's a real bonus for the students of Alberta.

The next thing was to deal with the health professionals. I will take exception to the hon. member's comments about flooding the market with qualified staff. I don't think that we should use our resources to train these people when there isn't a market for them. I agree with the member that there needs to be the right amount out there, and we do our utmost to determine what that right amount is and attempt to move towards that, but I don't believe that we should flood the market, although with his economics background he's probably correct in what he says.

On the apprenticeship side NAIT has had some issues. We've been dealing with NAIT on the issue of apprenticeship, and we do have that worked out, so I don't see that there will be the problem. Apprentices are very important. I will say for the benefit of the Assembly that the weakest link – and I'm not by any means impugning motives when I say this – is actually not at the education centres. The weakest link is out in the field, where there are not enough placements in the field. Our apprenticeship board does an excellent job. As I mentioned in my opening comments, we presently have reached over 40,000 active apprentices in Alberta. We are increasing by a net of about 140 a week.

So, Mr. Chairman, the apprenticeship industry – and I keep saying that – is truly a jewel in this crown, because they are world recognized, they're world renowned, and we get constant requests to go and apply our expertise around the world. For example, places such as Cuba are now utilizing our apprenticeship model. We will continue to do this.

Again some very interesting comments about the opportunities of men and women. I'm glad that they're sitting together so that they don't get into fisticuffs here now, but the hon. member is absolutely right. We are seeing a very substantial increase in the number of women going to university, which is great, but we are seeing a corresponding decrease in the number of men going to university and into postsecondary education. I believe, Mr. Chairman, that the secret to this does not necessarily lie in the postsecondary education but lies in the K to 12 system. We have to design a system that encourages males more. I know that 10 years ago it would have been heresy to say this, but we're actually seeing that occur now.

I go to graduations at the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary. The engineering faculty, for example, a faculty that traditionally has been all male, I would bet – and there's nothing scientific in the numbers that I'm saying – that 35 or 40 percent that are coming out are actually female now. I agree with the hon. member. I think that is good, but we do have to remember a part of the population that sometimes we forget, which is the males, when it comes to postsecondary and find a way to continue that.

I will add, Mr. Chairman, that in the G-8 conference that I went to two years ago – obviously, as the name implies, there are eight countries from around the world that make up the G-8 – this was an issue that was raised. How do we get males into the postsecondary? I also went to a Commonwealth conference, and in areas such as Africa their number one concern with education is: how do we get males into the education system? Because females were participating. I don't believe that we will ever fall down to the levels that they are in some of those countries, but I think it's something that we do need to be aware of and need to continue to be vigilant on.

The aboriginal students. Again, as in Public Accounts, I agree entirely with the hon. member. It is something that we're seeing, an increase in the number of aboriginal students in our population. We cannot and will not identify exactly the number of aboriginal students there are for a lot of FOIP reasons, things like privacy issues, but I will say to the hon. member that we are taking the proactive approach when it comes to aboriginal education. The two best examples that we have are with Edmonton public at Amiskwaciy Academy and the project – I'm sorry; the name escapes me right now – with Edmonton Catholic. What we're looking at with those two different projects is first of all an aboriginal high school, which is Amiskwaciy Academy. Although not exclusively aboriginal, it does specialize in aboriginal education. Second of all, we're looking at an inclusive approach to aboriginal education, that Edmonton Catholic is looking at. By doing both of these different approaches, we'll be able to look at the success. I truly say that probably both will be successful, and both will be flagships on what can be done with the aboriginal population in order to increase their level of education. They're very important elements of what we're doing.

The Universities Act. I agree again. Gee, this is a very awkward position for me today, Mr. Chairman. I actually agree with the issue about the zoning requirements in the Universities Act. I have talked to the universities extensively about this and urged them, even though it is not in the Municipal Government Act, to follow through on consultations with their public, to talk to their public about what is happening, and certainly they are doing that. I understand that the fireworks that were over there are not as bad as they used to be and

it will continue, but the hon. member is absolutely right. We will be looking at the Universities Act within the next year, and I assume that this will be a large part of reviewing the Universities Act as well.

4:40

Business partnerships. I'm a firm believer that businesses are excellent partners in the postsecondary system. In saying that, I will also say that no researcher who should even be called a researcher would attempt to have his research influenced by a business or a particular company, because the minute that that occurs, their research becomes null and void. I would hope that no one does that at our universities, and I certainly have not seen anything that would indicate that that is being done.

On the other hand, businesses have some very important questions to be answered. For example, if one specific company has a problem and they need it researched, then I have no problem if our researchers are the ones that do it, as long as they give a fair, responsible, accurate answer, and it will not always be what the businesses want and what they look for. I believe that the businesses that we have working with our institutions are honourable businesses and that they want a true answer, because in the long run the truth will always prevail, especially when it comes to research projects and research activities.

So I believe that the business partnerships are something to increase. I think it gives a lot of opportunities. I think it brings our businesses into the university atmosphere, and even more important, the people that we are putting out of our universities are people that are going to be employed by these businesses, and we need to know what they want. We need to know the quality of our students that they want, and we have to strive to do that. [interjection] No. That was the other comment that I was going to make.

Each university and college is defined under its own piece of legislation. So, for example, the board of governors of the university can act very independently. I trust from the things that I say that they will make the right decisions, and I have no reason to doubt that they will. I trust that the administration will make the right decisions, and until proven otherwise, I will continue to maintain that trust in the institutions.

Tuition fees. I've talked a little bit about that in response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The only other point that I would make is that the hon. member has raised the issue about our increases being more substantial than anywhere else. He's absolutely right. It has been the highest, but we also started from a lower point. Where our universities are in actual tuition with respect to the rest of the country is about in the middle of the pack. I believe we're around 23, 24, 25. When it comes to tuition across Canada, it is not an accurate assessment to take a provincial average on that. For example, the university in Charlottetown is a very small university and has almost no students. On the other hand, in Ontario there are something like 25 or 30 universities. So on the list of 45 universities we're about 23, 24, 25 when it comes to tuition. I'm by no means impugning anything in this, but I will just add that the tuition in the rest of the world is absolutely amazing when it comes to our tuition here. The price that we pay for our education here is still by far the best single investment that any family and any individual can make, and I would encourage all Members of the Legislative Assembly to ensure that their kids go to postsecondary education. That's sort of free-time political advice there.

The next question that was raised was on faculty retention. What is in here is actually an increase in the faculty retention from \$28 million to \$40 million this year. The \$28 million has been added into the base budget, and there's been another \$12 million that has been added on, so it is now a total of \$40 million that will be

continued on a yearly basis. I agree – you know, again I'm in this uncomfortable position of agreeing with the hon. member that our faculty are extremely important. They are being attracted by the numerous universities around the world, and we have to find a way to retain them. For that reason, we put the \$40 million and did not say specifically how it must be spent other than it must be spent on staff. Each individual university has the ability to take that money and distribute it to their staff as they see fit. Some universities, for example, are taking it and putting it in a pot to attract the, quote, all-stars of universities, which are obviously very essential to university life. Other people are distributing it equally to all faculties. So it is up to the universities. We do have a faculty retention paper. We had a group of people take a look at this very serious issue, and hopefully that will be coming out in the next three or four weeks to a month.

The last thing that I'll respond to is the funding for postsecondary and what it is. Yes, it went up 6.3 percent this year, 2.6 percent next year, 3.2 percent the year after, for a total of 12.4 percent over three years. So it ends up being a little over 4 percent per year. I will reiterate, though – albeit I said this last year, I believe, in exactly the same location – that I wanted to ensure that I could deliver on these budgets. I hope that at some point the budgets will be improved, because I do believe that it is a good investment in education, but at this particular time this is what we can afford and can guarantee to the universities. If they do get more funding, then realistically it becomes a bonus. But this is something that they can plan on and that they can take to the bank, recognizing, as I say this, that I also said this last year, and following September 11 we were not able to live up to that. Barring another September 11, barring a huge financial crisis in the province of Alberta, this is something that we can live with.

With that, again if I missed any questions, we'll ensure that they're given in writing.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I won't take very much of the time in here, but there were a couple of comments that I wanted to make. First off, Minister, you know, it's been a fairly tough year between government and our schools, our ATA, and our Alberta School Boards Association, and the latest, the \$54 million that isn't in this particular budget but will have to come forward at some point. Is that going to have any negative impact on any of your other programs? I guess that's sort of the angle I'm coming at. Will it in fact, do you think, help to heal some of the wounds that have been out there?

This is something that's really important to all of us as MLAs trying to deal with issues inside the schools, to deal with issues of parents' concerns, of students' concerns, of programs that have been canceled. You know, not just as an MLA but as somebody who had two sons that went through the public system, I have a huge appreciation for how hard so many teachers worked to make that education a good experience for my sons: one slightly more academic, and the other slightly more into perhaps the CTS model, where industrial arts was a huge thing in his life. It was an incredibly important thing to him.

I guess one of the things, Mr. Chairman, that I would like to get at is that we spent a lot of time in this province trying to develop an education system that is geared much more I think towards a postsecondary education, where you would move forward into a college or a university, and that's an admirable goal. It's unrealistic to think that all of our kids can achieve that. That is not where all of them are at. Some of them are much more technical and hands-on.

My question on this particular area would be: would we, are we,

can we consider at some point looking at streaming some of these kids that are showing us by grade 8 or grade 9 that maybe they're not as academically inclined but much more able to utilize their hands in a physical way to move forward so that by the time they're in grade 12 and they're graduating from grade 12, they've already got some great momentum going on a career? We don't then have to take them from there and put them into something else for three, four, five years when in fact by the time they were 20 they could easily be earning a living, contributing to society, and having the best of all possible worlds. I'd just like to know. I'm sure that there are places around the province where that in fact occurs, but I don't think it's a general trend. It's very difficult in a city like Airdrie with 22,000 people. Inside the Rocky View school division we have 14,000 students. I know that my son couldn't have been the only one that would have benefited from that ability, but there is virtually nothing like that in my area, which is Airdrie-Rocky View. So could we, will we look at something like that?

4:50

With regard to the commission that's coming up, Minister, I think it is going to be one of the most fundamentally important things that happens in this province in the next five or 10 years, the impact, the potential that they have. This can't be just about, you know, what our pupil/teacher ratio is or a specific issue in a classroom. It's got to be bigger than that. We've got to look at the whole issue of how education is going to be delivered in the future.

I've got a virtual school in my riding, Mr. Minister, and it's just a phenomenal thing to be able to meet with these kids that have access to this type of an education. Their reasons for wanting to be in a virtual program are so massively various. It's everything from – some of them are figure skaters; some of them are big into showing horses. But they can access this education, do a great job on-line. They love it. I went to their graduation last year, just some of the coolest kids I've ever met and just so pumped about life and about their education and their opportunity. Interestingly enough, Mr. Chairman, some of these children were not necessarily academically inclined when they and their parents made the decision to move into a virtual school. Some of them just truly hated being in a classroom, and they were having trouble. This gave them another route, another opportunity, and I'm so proud that our education system has responded in that way.

I think the fact that parents and children have choices, whether it's a public school system, a Catholic school system, a virtual school, which is run by Rocky View, whether it's charter schools or home schooling or correspondence, the on-line aspect of everything is crucial. So I'd like some assurance that when your commission goes out there, they're not going to just look at the way it is but the way it can be to encourage kids to stay in school.

While it's not evident in here, I still think that our dropout rate is probably 25 to 30-some percent. I don't know, because it's really hard to find that number. You know, I have 800 graduates in Rocky View this year, but how many kids didn't graduate because they left in grade 10, 11, or 12? A lot of them come back, you know, maybe two years later or three years later. There's a great school here in Edmonton called Centre High, that attracts some of the kids that are having problems, who can go there and get their focus back. I've heard that it's extraordinarily successful, with 3,200 kids going through it last year. But we need to keep them in in the first place. We don't need them going out and wasting two or three or four years of their lives because they've not understood the value of this education.

I'm hoping that the minister would be able to maybe address that. This should be a performance measurement not just for government,

not just for the Alberta School Boards Association but also for the ATA, everybody here. We are supposed to be a partnership, and I think that we've let a lot of kids down in this province.

We had years ago a term called "functional illiterate." We had kids that were graduating. They were getting their grade 12 diploma and were not maybe able to function properly or appropriately out in the world, and some pretty interesting negative comments rained down from the employers out there that were trying to hire kids that really could not do much of anything inside that workplace.

We need to make sure that when we look at our education system, when we have this wonderful opportunity with this commission, we look at all of it, not just the bits and pieces that perhaps a few special interest groups want us to look at but all of it, so that when we talk about education 10 years from now, we are leading the world in where education needs to be, what we're doing for our children, who will then in turn do it for the rest of us when we start retiring. We need them to have skills and a level of enthusiasm about this province.

I would also like to see their government studies enhanced to the point where maybe some of them really understand what government is. Government is just people representing them. We are not some huge bureaucracy sitting up here passing arbitrary laws on them. Rather, we are members of their communities. We are people, just as they are, who need health care, who need education, who need good roads to drive on, the same as every other human being in this province. And I need those roads, Ed.

I don't want to really spend much more time other than to say that there was a mark of a great civilization going back hundreds and hundreds of years. When a kingdom, you know – it could have been an empire of some kind. If you really wanted to know if it was going to succeed, you knew it by the level of the people that were attracted to it. Those people were educated people. They were people that were great artists. They were people that made their communities better. Ours is better because we have a good education system that at times borders on great. We have a good university and college system. I think of Olds College, which is close to my riding, just one of the most phenomenal places, and it is partnerships that have made it great. They have done a phenomenal job there. I'm extraordinarily proud to even have my name ever associated with Olds College. I think that some of our universities could take a page out of Olds College's book, by the way.

I think that if Alberta is going to continue to do as well as it does, it must continue to strive forward on education. It's not a we/they situation. It has to be an us. It's better for all of us. Thank you for your time, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very, very quickly I just want to address a couple of issues. When it comes to the comments about the functionally illiterate, I want to reassure the hon. member that on the recent exams that were done worldwide, we finished number one in reading. So I think that myself and my previous colleagues who have had this ministry have done a very good job on the reading side of it, and I will especially commend the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness for the early literacy initiatives that he introduced when he was the minister.

I will just reiterate what the hon. member said about choice. We have several different school systems, be it the public system, the separate school system, the Francophone school system, that have a myriad of schools, be they charter schools, virtual schools, storefront schools, hockey schools. You name it. I believe that's one of the biggest advantages of our system.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: There are two additional members who have indicated that they would like to speak. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, and if time permits, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, my goodness. Okay. I know my own colleague, the critic, is also interested in getting up. A couple of topics I'd like to touch on, then, for the minister. At this point I expect that it'll just go into *Hansard*, and he can respond in writing to me.

I'd like to talk about translation, women in the curriculum, apprenticeship for women, research, and fetal alcohol syndrome kids, and some lottery funding money. So a couple of questions.

When I look under 2.2.1, operating support for basic education, it looks like the support from the lotteries for basic learning increased by 35 percent. Now, I questioned the minister in Public Accounts the other day; in fact, it was yesterday. If this is a core program, then why is gaming revenue being used to support it? The government is on record as saying that it's not using gaming revenue for core programming. Certainly that's what came out of the gaming summit. So I'm hearing two messages at the same time from the government. If I could get clarification, please.

Under 3.1.3, Learning television, I'm wondering about the major commitments of lottery money that are going to fund operating expenses such as Learning television. I think in fact that one of my colleagues had asked a question the other week in question period about how much each department was putting into supporting Learning television. So if I could get that answered.

The minister spoke in the past about the on-line curriculum repository. I'm wondering what steps the minister has taken to provide the additional computers that will be required by this on-line curriculum repository. This is a real concern for my schools. All of my schools are classed as inner city. I recognize that the minister's going to make fund-raising illegal, but that doesn't matter to us because none of my parents can fund-raise because they're all working. So we're wondering where we're supposed to come up with a computer per kid and one more at home so that they can read their new textbooks on-line. Perhaps there's a strategy being developed there. Perhaps it's a partnership with business, as the minister just talked about. We're just interested in how that might be coming about.

5:00

I think that other people have already asked the minister about an update on the native students policy and program, and I will leave that. One of the things that's happening in my schools is we have always had a very high percentage of immigrants and new Canadians in our schools. Where people that have just arrived tend to go is to the very low-cost housing areas, which are in the centre of the cities at this point. Three years ago I think in one school about 60 percent of the kids were of Asian heritage. It brought us up to about 85 or 90 percent of kids from other areas, Africa and the Slavic countries, and a small percentage of off-reserve aboriginal children. That percentage of off-reserve aboriginal children is now increasing quite a bit, and some of them need support.

I'm wondering: given what we know about the increase of FAS and FAE, is the minister looking ahead and how is he looking ahead in future budgets and business plans at a comprehensive program to work with these FAS/FAE children? I am seeing this as an increasing stress or pressure on our system, certainly a concern for all of us, who want all children to do well, yet here we have a specific group of kids who will likely not do well. How does that affect their classmates? Once they're out of school, it affects a whole bunch of



other things, but let's start with where we can do something, and that's in the school system. I'm looking for what specifically this ministry is looking to do: what kinds of programs, money that's dedicated to it, evaluation and monitoring. I'd like to see a comprehensive program laid out where everybody is aware of what's going to happen here.

As I was just mentioning, of the kids in my schools there's a very high percentage of immigrant and new Canadian kids. I'm wondering if there's money in the budget for translation or how the minister expects that schools in Edmonton-Centre and schools in other constituencies, I'm sure, are expected to cope with translation. It's something that we have to do. If we're going to send notes home with kids, they have to be translated if we really intend that the parents are going to get the message. I was recently in a school talking about a project that I'm sponsoring in the community and was told flat out that I'd better translate into eight languages and was then told what the languages were. They're not kidding. When they send home important notices to parents, they must translate. Now, in some cases they can get someone that will provide this service for free, but this is not something that's easy to do. This is a difficult task for someone, and they don't remain a free volunteer forever. In some cases you can't get anyone who will donate the translation services, so you're paying up front for those every time. That is a cost to these schools, and they're willing to and must bear it, but I'm wondering where the minister comes in on this one, or is it just something that they have to cope with?

Women's curriculum. I'm encouraging the minister to continue to look at incorporating women's contribution and women's history into the curriculum. We still don't have the Famous Five as part of the curriculum in Alberta schools, and I think that is an onerous oversight. Before I leave office, I would certainly like to see that happen and to know that I was able to encourage the government to include that. I mean, we've got little girls in Alberta that don't know what nation builders we had in this province in the Famous Five. [interjection] That's true. We've got big girls that don't even know that.

Also, I'm looking at the whole area of apprenticeship, which also falls under this. Now, we know we have a shortage of skilled workers. I'm wondering whether the minister has looked for any programs that are particularly targeted to encourage young women to move into apprenticeship programs in the trades. They always tend to get slotted into hairdressing and secretarial, and frankly there are only so many secretaries and hairdressers that you can get in the world. There are only so many positions, and frankly those girls would make a lot more money if they were welders and plumbers. [interjection] Well, honest to goodness, look at it. How much does a secretary make? How much does a welder make? I mean, my brother is an ironworker. That boy is going to retire. I'm going to end up working till I'm 85. He's a freedom 55 guy. You know, he's been careful with his money, but he's worked darn hard, and he has consistently made more money per hour than I have. So good on him. He's worked darn hard for that and in some pretty crappy weather outside. But young women could be making that kind of money too. I'm encouraging the minister to look at that, and I'd like to have some kind of concrete answer back.

I'd just like to pick up on something that the minister said about research, where he felt that no researcher worth their salt would ever taint or slant their research product to please a sponsor. Well, I'm sure that does happen somewhere, but I think what we really have to be concerned about here are two other things. One is: who gets chosen for research? If what you are trying to do isn't attractive to sponsors that are coming in with the big bucks, you're not going to get the research money to do your project in the first place, so that's a form of selection. The other form is self-censorship. Someone

goes: well, I could work on these three different projects here that I'm really interested in; I'm going to pick the one that I think is going to attract a sponsor. Right there is a self-selection, a self-censorship. So projects never even get brought forward now because there's such an emphasis not on academic research and pure research but on how do I make the sexiest grant proposal to get money out of whatever: Merck Frosst or Coca-Cola or Nike. That in itself, I think, is tainting our research – tainting is too strong a word – colouring our research. I just wanted to make that point with the minister. That's why we need academic institutions that are reasonably funded, so that they don't have to go looking for that kind of money for every research project that they're going to do.

Those are the points that I most wanted to raise. The other ones I will perhaps direct to the minister in writing, and I'd appreciate getting a written response to the questions that I've raised so far. Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll use the remaining few minutes. The minister has kindly agreed not to speak and to respond, I guess, in writing.

I was quite struck by the observations that were made by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View in terms of questions and advice to the minister. She did speak about the need for having some information on why high school girls and boys drop out, how many drop out, what percentage drops out, what reasons are there for which they drop out. We need to know this. So my question to the minister on this one is: as part of his study that the blue-ribbon panel will do, will he charge this committee with asking some of these questions and getting some research done so that we have the answers? Otherwise, we'll continue to speculate, and if we base our actions on speculation, they won't deliver the results.

Another set of words that the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View used were when she referred to the deep wounds that have been left behind, perhaps, by the teachers' dispute with the government, and she raised questions about: are there provisions in the budget to deal with some of the problems that arise from that? I think it's an important reminder to the minister to pay attention to it. I strongly concur with the member if that's what she said. I don't want to put words in her mouth, but I think that's what she said, and I think I want to reinforce that, that the minister needs to take some concrete action to deal with it and settle these matters before they do serious, permanent damage to our education system, that has taken so long to build.

I was going to ask the minister if as part of his commission's terms of reference the postsecondary education system is going to be at all addressed. If not, I would ask the minister if he has on his agenda to set up a working committee or a commission to address the challenges that we face in the postsecondary system. Many of them have been referred to, including the one on participation patterns of young people not only along gender lines, but I'd remind the minister again that there are income-related disparities there that are emerging in terms of participation.

One of the studies that I referred to earlier, done by the senate of the University of Alberta itself, draws attention to the fact that 88.6 percent of students believe that students from middle- and high-income brackets are more likely to attend university than those from low-income brackets, and I think it's a pattern that needs to be broken if it is there. We need the minister to pay some attention to it, get some research done, and tell us what policies he has to counter these developing disparities in terms of participation, be they related to gender, be they related to income or to rural/urban areas. My

suspicion is that some of these disparities may have to do with urban/rural participation rates, and we need to pay attention to it. Otherwise, rural areas will continually suffer from accumulating disadvantage resulting from our inability to address these.

5:10

Having made these brief remarks, I want to just return very quickly to a few other points and to the need to review the Universities Act, particularly with reference to the ability of the universities to override zoning requirements that are in place and are used by municipalities to address the concerns of particular communities that may be affected by new developments, traffic flows, population concentrations, and what have you. The Member for Edmonton-Riverview indicated that part of the university falls in his constituency and he hears their concerns. The other part of the university falls rightly in my constituency, the Garneau area. With College Plaza, that he referred to earlier on, this new development certainly caused a great deal of concern among the residents of the Garneau area, a substantial part of my constituency. I had to meet with the community members for several months to address some of their concerns, and they are not satisfied with the resolution that the university presented to the concerns that they had.

Similarly, Garneau area residents were very concerned just a few months ago about a new student housing development north of 87th Avenue in the Garneau area. Again I met with the community representatives. They have a great deal of concern about the growing indifference on the part of the university to respond to the concerns of the surrounding communities. So there is a need, I think, particularly with reference to the ability of the university to override the zoning requirements, for this to be reviewed as part of the Universities Act review.

The minister made some comments on the benignness and the desirability of business partnerships. I don't think the business partnerships are of unmitigated benefit to universities. Universities as academic institutions have a culture which is very distinct and different from that of the business organizations. We don't have to be critical of business organizations to recognize the value of academic culture in itself, but there is something called hidden curriculum. If the business presence on campuses and schools becomes pre-eminent and the overall direction of university functions gets so closely tied to business needs, we will then find a new kind of curriculum emerging there. The values that begin to dominate the scholarly work, the learning, and so on and so forth — universities can get very much influenced by the business ethic rather than by the ethic of doing research, pursuing knowledge, pursuing discovery for itself in its own right.

Think of the government as a society. We need to be careful not to damage, not to limit the ability of knowledge-producing institutions and have them become always concerned about what business will say. Autonomy in their ability to do research and engage in research is very important, and so is it important for the development of future generations of scholars and scientists and policymakers. They also need to be able to think critically, independently, and value the autonomy of university organizations.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but pursuant to the understanding agreed to unanimously by the Assembly earlier this afternoon, I must now put the following questions.

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Learning, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$3,399,292,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$156,700,000

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'd move that the committee rise and report the estimates of the Department of Learning and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

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.

Department of Learning: operating expense and capital investment, \$3,399,292,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$156,700,000.

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'd move that we call it a weekend and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; at 5:18 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]