



Province of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

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The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature

First Session

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[Errata, if any, appear inside back cover]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Weadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly four dedicated community leaders committed to education of the youth of this province and specifically to the University of Lethbridge: Bob Turner, chair of the board of governors; Bill Cade, president and vice-chancellor; Jim Horsman, Chancellor Emeritus and former Deputy Premier in this House; and Richard Westlund, director of government relations. All four guests are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would ask these four gentlemen to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a great honour to introduce to you and through you 14 students from a school in Blackie, Alberta. It's a great school. I spent 12 years there myself, so that's a real testament, of course, to the school. And look where I ended up. Anyway, these 14 students today are here with their teacher, Debra Sorensen-Valette; parents Lori Ellice, Kathy Peoples, Jim Smith, Jackie Steer, and a couple of people named Sharmayne and Glen Groeneveld. They, of course, have their favourite son, Curtis, with them here today. I would ask them to rise and get the usual warm reception.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 36 students from Blessed Sacrament school in Wainwright. We had the customary picture on the steps of the Legislature, and the students asked some fantastic questions. I'm very proud to say that I am always reminded what great shape this province is in for generations to come given the calibre of students that we have.

I'd also like to introduce their teachers, Mrs. Michelle Folk and Mrs. Lora Miller, and parent helpers Mr. René Rajotte, Mrs. Jean Watson, and Mrs. Siobhan Mavin.

Those teachers and parent helpers are the reason why the next generation is going to be so great for this province. I'd ask them all to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of ESL students from St. Joseph high school in my fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre. Amongst this group of students we have those that have come from Liberia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and the Sudan. That's just a few of them in this group. They're sitting in the public gallery. I would ask you all to join me in welcoming the 15 that are there, 13 students along with their teachers, Ms Gerry Dawson and Ms Marcella Bos. If they could all please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have a second group that is visiting the gallery at a time during question period when they won't be able to be introduced in person, but I would like to put my welcome to them on the record. That is a group from NorQuest College. They're grade 10 students, also in ESL. The NorQuest students have always been very keen observers of our question period, so I look forward to welcoming them in the gallery, and I will send them a copy of the *Hansard* with this greeting for them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to this Assembly I would like to introduce the Jamaica Association of Northern Alberta, seated above me in the public gallery, and their group leader, Ms Dorothy Drummond. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm greeting of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Doerksen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to introduce to you and through you 16 members of the Tilley school, who are accompanied by a group of parents and teachers. First of all, I'd like to introduce the principal of the Tilley school, Mrs. Szandra Muschiol, who I also want to add taught school to some of my sons a few years ago, as well as teacher Miss Mikkenna Clifton and parents accompanying the group: Mrs. Julie Tateson, Mr. Mark Chappell, and Mrs. Sylvia Vigna. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Knight: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Miss Melanie Semen; her father, Jerry Semen; and her grandparents, Norman and Evelyn Johnson. Melanie comes from the Department of Energy and has been a tremendous help in our office the last couple of weeks. I'm so very pleased that her father and grandparents could be here to see Melanie in action. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you two distinguished visitors from Winnenden, near Stuttgart, Germany. Marcel Schwarz is a former rock 'n' roll star who is now a senior consultant in project and process at Daimler AG, the global service and parts division of Mercedes-Benz. He's also an active member of Amnesty

International, and since he's living in a wine region, his hobby is making his own wine.

Erin Schwarz grew up just southwest of Calgary and did very well showing horses, but she traded in Alberta's Rockies for Switzerland's Alps in 1999 and has been working at a top dental office in Stuttgart since 2005. She accompanied my wife, Jennifer, and I to Mount Everest base camp a few years ago. Just last summer Jen was the matron of honour, and I was humbled to serve as the master of ceremonies when Erin and Marcel were married here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, now that they're back for a visit, hopefully we can get them to stay just a little bit longer in our fair province. Erin and Marcel, if you would please rise to accept the warm wishes of this fine Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you two teachers from St. Clement elementary/junior high school, located in Edmonton-Ellerslie, Leanne Hemphill and Jeff Boddez. I would first like to introduce Leanne Hemphill. Leanne has taught grade 3 at St. Clement for the past four years. Leanne has been recognized for integrating technology into her teaching lessons. Leanne is a semifinalist for excellence in teaching awards. She is accompanied today by her parents, Jolaine and Richard Martin. Secondly, I would like to introduce Jeff Boddez. Jeff has spent eight and a half years teaching grade 9 at St. Clement. One of Jeff's particular strengths has been working within the skill set of individual students and expanding their personal expectations. Jeff is a finalist for excellence in teaching, and he is going to be recognized in Calgary on May 10. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House, please.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Turtle Mountain Rockfall Monitoring Project

Mr. Berger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 29, 1903, at 4:10 in the morning an avalanche of limestone fell from the top of Turtle Mountain and buried a portion of the town of Frank in the Crowsnest Pass. Of the 600 sleeping people who lived in Frank, roughly 100 individuals lived in the path of the slide, and 70 Albertans were killed that morning.

Today visitors to the Crowsnest Pass can safely explore the history of the slide while discovering the incredible perseverance of early Albertans who lived in the area and rebuilt their town and the access to it. At the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre visitors can also learn about the primary cause of the slide and the mountain's unstable structure.

Since 1903 there has been a long history of vigilance and commitment to public safety regarding Turtle Mountain. Very soon after the slide mine engineers established markers to point out prominent openings on the mountain, and one of the first monitoring devices was installed in 1933. Since 2005 a state-of-the-art predictive monitoring system has been used on Turtle Mountain. The primary purpose of this system is to provide early warning of any future rockfall hazard. This project enhances public safety and provides ample opportunity for significant scientific research.

The Energy Resources Conservation Board and the Alberta Geological Survey have announced a fortification of the Turtle Mountain monitoring system. By the end of this summer the number of monitoring stations will double to 80. The hon. Minister

of Energy, minister responsible for the ERCB, myself, and department staff were on-site yesterday morning at the top of the mountain to help deliver this announcement.

Mr. Speaker, the safety of Albertans is job number one. The ERCB's on-site monitors will predict a slide and further protect public safety by monitoring the entire face of Turtle Mountain. The latest technology is being used. This is a world-class model of technology and innovation. The work that the ERCB has done with government agencies and first responders to develop an emergency response plan is an example of the action our government and our government agencies take to protect Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Education Week

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week, April 27 to May 3, is Education Week in Alberta. This is an opportunity to thank our teachers, administrators, support staff, school councils, volunteers, school boards, and parents for their contributions to Alberta's world-class learning system. Through collaboration and partnerships Alberta students, whether public, separate, charter, private, home-schooled, francophone, First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, are benefiting every day from all that our education system has to offer, including a high-quality curriculum, outstanding resources, and high-quality assessment programs.

This year's Education Week theme is Today's Achievements Expand Tomorrow's Horizons, which provides all Albertans with an opportunity to celebrate and embrace the good things our education system is doing today in preparing for tomorrow.

Alberta students benefit from an education system that is progressive and engaging. With each passing day schools and curricula are becoming more internationally orientated and embracing new technologies as a means to deliver Alberta's world-class curriculum. Due to these efforts, our students will be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed for success in an increasingly complex world.

All across this province students and teachers are involved in Education Week activities. I would like to direct members of this House to the Alberta Education website, education.alberta.ca, where they can read for themselves the many school activities occurring in their constituencies this week.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Albertans and our Assembly to celebrate Education Week, April 27 to May 3, and to recognize the teachers and all the stakeholders who are making a tremendous difference in the lives of our students across the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Assistance for Seniors

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a plea on behalf of a group of senior citizens living in a seniors' complex in central Edmonton who have serious concerns about how the rising cost of living is affecting their lives. In particular, they are being impacted drastically by increases in rent, in utility costs – and that doesn't even include the cost of telephones for local calls – in prescription drugs, and in food. They certainly understand that they are not alone in this situation. However, they feel that since most of them are now living below the poverty line and are by now too old to do anything about the situation themselves, they are at the mercy of decisions and programs which come from the provincial government.

For this reason, they are petitioning the provincial government to do the right thing and assist them and others like them who live everywhere in Alberta. They can't stop the cost of living from rising, but the government, out of its gigantic surpluses year by year, can find ways to help them. The seniors did the work that needed to be done. Now they only ask for a bit of the help as they come to the end of their days. They think that's only fair.

It is true they receive increases, some of them every year, but they are very small compared with the astronomical rise in the cost of living. More to the point, even these small increases are almost eaten by the increasing rent, so in fact they don't even have small adjustments for the rising cost of living. They have been subjected to these unfair conditions for too long, and they've asked me as their MLA to lay their concerns before the Legislative Assembly in the form of a petition, which I will do later as a tabling.

They are asking the Assembly to lower their rent back to 25 per cent of income, like it was a few years ago, instead of the 30 per cent they pay now. And that's without utilities. In fact, they are paying more than the 30 per cent because utilities are so high, and it comes to a total of about 70 per cent of their income. It is too much for most of the seniors here who have many problems buying their medical supplies, which are not covered by Blue Cross, as well as buying vitamins and supplements, which are also not covered, and now dental fees are higher than Blue Cross can cover even if they have 100 per cent coverage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Random Dog Searches

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that police cannot use random dog searches to find drugs at schools or in public places with the exception of airports. The implications of this ruling are far reaching.

In its first decision on sniffer dogs the court sided with a high school student and a man who was caught with cocaine in his luggage. In both cases the court ruled that police violated the Charter right against unreasonable search and seizure by allowing dogs to embark on general searches of a school and bus depot without concrete reasons to suspect drugs were present. The majority decision said that students are entitled to privacy in a school environment.

This particular student, Mr. Speaker, was found with 10 bags of marijuana, 10 magic mushrooms, and assorted drug paraphernalia. The court also ruled that drug trafficking is a serious matter, but so are the constitutional rights of the travelling public.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of travelling this province as chair of the safer communities task force under the leadership of our Premier. We heard over and over about the issue of drugs and alcohol and the devastation that they are causing. Drugs are illegal, and I believe that the police should be given the tools they need to stop the damaging effects that drugs have on users and families and friends.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Grey Cup in Calgary 2009

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to attend an impressive announcement with our Premier and the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit last Thursday, at which time Canadian Football League commissioner Mark Cohon awarded the 2009 Grey Cup to the city of Calgary.

This is not happening by accident all of a sudden, Mr. Speaker. The local businessmen who bought the Stampeders in January 2005 turned the team in a brand new direction, and with the experience and expertise of Calgarians Ted Hellard, John Forzani, and Doug Mitchell the football club has once again become a perennial Grey Cup contender and a profitable business.

Calgarians, of course, have a rich history with the Grey Cup. In 1948 the Stamps put together the only perfect season in CFL history, capped by a Grey Cup win over the Ottawa Rough Riders. Calgarians turned downtown Toronto into a party zone, kicking off the whole notion of a Grey Cup festival. I'm completely convinced that Stampeders president Scott Ackles, who is ultimately responsible for overseeing the event, will put on the best Grey Cup yet with the assistance of festival president Greg Albrecht and festival chair Malcolm Kirk.

The Alberta government is very proud to be of assistance in bringing the Grey Cup to Calgary with a \$1.1 million grant from the other initiatives program. It's a fabulous opportunity for the city and province to come together to showcase western hospitality, sport, recreation, entertainment, and good, clean fun. Tens of thousands of visitors will come to Calgary for Canada's greatest sports tradition, and the economic impact is expected to be in the neighbourhood of \$35 million.

Mr. Speaker, with the current crossover playoff format there's even a chance that the Stampeders might be playing the Eskimos. If that's the case, since indeed this is a truly Canadian event, I suppose it's only appropriate that the winning team should be wearing red and white.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

Farm Worker Safety

Dr. Taft: Agricultural workers, even in large feedlots and on industrial farms with dozens of employees, are exempt in this province from laws that protect their occupational health and safety. It can't be just coincidence that agricultural workers in Alberta are also five times more likely to die in occupation-related accidents. Yet the minister of agriculture says that safety laws don't work and that the only answer is education. To the minister of agriculture: where is his evidence to support the policy that education alone is better than legislation in creating safe workplaces for agricultural workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again the hon. Leader of the Opposition comes up with a stat. Five times what? What's he comparing this to? I don't really understand the question, but I will tell you that we certainly do believe in education and training, and that's what the people are asking for.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that many agricultural operations have dozens of employees, is there any limit to the size of an agricultural operation before it is no longer exempt from safety laws?

Mr. Groeneveld: Not to my knowledge, Mr. Speaker. I guess it's up to the individual how they want to register their operation, whether it's a company or whether it's a family practice or whether it's a partnership. I have no knowledge of a cut-off line there.

Dr. Taft: Well, to the same minister: given the spirit of TILMA, will this government bring Alberta's farm worker safety standards in line with those of British Columbia?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will tell the hon. member this: I will do exactly what the agriculture community asks for.

Now, I'm responsible for dozens of operations, whether it's cattle, hogs, grain, maybe the AAMD and C. None of these people have come to me asking for these regulations that you're asking for. That's why I ask him to ask his own rural caucus. Of course, he doesn't have one. I forgot that. You know, there are some real excellent ones on my side of the House that you may want to talk to in the recess.

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

New Royalty Framework

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since I raised concerns in this Assembly two weeks ago about the \$120 price limit in the new royalty regime, major forecasts have been released for oil prices that see it going way beyond \$120, yet the government's royalty regime stops being price sensitive at \$120. The time to address this issue is now so that Alberta's energy industry can plan with confidence and this province can avoid unnecessary controversy. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Given the new price environment for oil, will the minister move quickly to raise the price sensitivity of the royalty system above \$120?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that yesterday I read an analyst's report with respect to the future price of oil globally as a commodity. His price range in the next three years was between \$50 and \$60 a barrel. There are analysts and industry representatives and players on all sides of this issue that have a number of different levels or plateaus where they think oil will go. We believe that we're in good shape.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the same minister: why don't the same principles of price sensitivity that apply to oil below \$120 apply to oil above \$120?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, again, I think it's quite clear that if the price of that commodity exceeds \$120 a barrel, we still receive an increased amount of royalty. It doesn't stop there. There is a percentage that's taken. The percentage is capped when you reach \$120 a barrel. Let's remember that there are very few barrels of oil that leave the province of Alberta at \$120 when west Texas intermediate is at \$120. Most of our oil is discounted quite a bit from there.

Dr. Taft: Well, given that the royalty regime won't be active until January 1, 2009, doesn't this minister foresee the risk that he is setting the stage for his government's royalty regime to be outdated before it's even implemented?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, of course, the date that we've set for our

new royalty framework to be implemented is, indeed, January 2009. We believe that our government requires a timeline in order to put the IT in place and get the proper regulations and some legislative adjustments made in order to do that. I believe that when we're into that era, in the 2009 region, we will have in place a proper framework.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Climate Change

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government's propaganda arm, the Public Affairs Bureau, is getting a hefty boost of \$25 million in funding courtesy of Alberta taxpayers to convince everyone that Alberta is a good environmental steward. This is a blatant greenwashing of the largest ecological footprint on the planet, and Albertans are not fooled. To the Minister of Environment: why are you spending \$25 million of spin when you could be taking real action on climate change?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are taking real action. As I've pointed out to this House on a number of occasions, Alberta is the first jurisdiction in North America that has introduced legislation, has passed legislation, and in fact has that legislation in effect with respect to climate change.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. How is it, Mr. Minister, that the federal government, with relatively weak commitment and targets on climate change, is still higher than Alberta?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a plan that is a realistic plan, that is an achievable plan, and that will result in very real reductions in CO₂ that can be substantiated and will be substantiated.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this minister and this Premier stand up and eliminate this \$25 million propaganda campaign, redirecting the money to real change in Alberta?

Mr. Stelmach: No, we're not going to do that. In fact, we do have a matter to deal with to make sure that all — all — people, those that invest in Alberta, those people that want to make Alberta their home, get the correct information. I can tell you that I'm not going to rely on that group or Greenpeace or Sierra Club to spread the misinformation not only in this province and this country but around the world.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, you have three questions, but it seems to me you've already interjected about four times, so maybe you owe me one. Proceed.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's actually about seven or eight.

Renter Assistance

Mr. Mason: A recent report by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation indicates that Edmonton rents are set to rise by another 14 per cent this year, after sky-high rent increases last year. Conservative inaction on housing continues to hurt Alberta tenants. The Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs actually brags about her

government increasing spending on landlord subsidies by almost \$20 million, blissfully ignoring the fact that those subsidies are not lowering rents and will probably make the situation worse. My question is to that minister. If throwing more money at landlords is the solution to housing costs, then why are rents continuing to increase dramatically?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm fully aware of the rental increases that are occurring. We know too, though, that the market is softening. The rent program that we have is assisting people as well with the rental increases that they've had. As I mentioned to you previously, the increase has been significant this year. There is at least a 40 per cent increase in the rent supplement program, and it's to assist the very people that this member is bringing forward.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that this money goes from the pocket of the tenant directly to landlords, doesn't the minister agree that it encourages landlords to jack up rents even further since you're subsidizing those rent increases, and if not, why not?

2:00

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, no. I don't agree, actually. That's not encouraging the landlords to do that. In fact, we have landlords in Calgary through the Calgary Apartment Association who have placed a thousand apartments onto the market to assist people with rental accommodation. Yes, some people do need assistance. We do gear our rental income supports to 30 per cent of an individual's income, and we are there to support people in need so that they aren't out on the street, hon. member, and that's what this program is all about. It's an excellent program, and it is working.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that a survey done by the Edmonton Social Planning Council has indicated that 47 per cent of respondents said their rental situation is worse than last year, will the minister admit that her plan is simply not working?

Mrs. Fritz: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very, very good plan, and in fact it is working, and we know that it's working. We have excellent management bodies. There are 44 across this province that are assessing applications, that are working with individuals throughout the province in a number of municipalities.

I can tell you this. With this 40 per cent increase in this program, we will assist even more people than we're helping today, and we'll continue to do that as the market changes. We all know here in this Assembly that the housing market, the rental market, is changing in the province of Alberta and that it's actually getting far better, Mr. Speaker.

Long-term and Continuing Care

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, ensuring the care of our vulnerable senior citizens is a very serious responsibility of the government of Alberta, and I am confident this government is committed to this role, yet some Albertans are concerned about the conversion of long-term

care facilities to designated assisted living residences. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why are these conversions taking place?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to put on record the fact that in Alberta we have over 14,000 long-term care beds in some 200 facilities, and only 124 of those beds have been converted, so that's hardly the crisis that members of our third party were trying to lead this House to believe about a week or so ago. But what is important is that we provide the facilities and care in the communities where seniors reside, and that's the essence of what, working with the minister of seniors, we'll be doing as part of our health action plan.

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, my second question to the same minister: what is this government's aging in place policy intended to achieve?

Mr. Liepert: Well, that's precisely part of what the first answer was, Mr. Speaker. What we are attempting to achieve is to provide the facilities in the communities where our seniors live. We provide through assisted living opportunities to have 24-hour nursing care, direct access to palliative and acute care, and we want to ensure that we provide the facilities that are required in the communities, not start to try to categorize what's good and what's not good.

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental question is for the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What is her ministry doing to address the support of living needs of Alberta's low-income seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of my mandate letter my ministry is committed to increasing access and improving quality, supply, and client choice in the continuing care system. In the '08-09 budget we have allocated close to \$80 million to the affordable supportive living initiative.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, we'll get to your budget this afternoon. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Environmentally Friendly Packaging

Mr. Hehr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although I am new here, I've come to realize this government favours so-called Alberta-based solutions, often in the meantime dismissing proactive measures taken in other jurisdictions. On that note, last week the town of Turner Valley enacted a ban on polystyrene products. This Alberta-based solution follows similar measures banning plastic grocery bags in large municipalities like San Francisco and on the national level in Israel and Ireland. Given that plastic bags are unnecessary and environmentally hazardous, will the Environment minister commit to a retail ban or a levy on plastic bags?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to substantial reductions in the amount of waste that's generated by Albertans. The banning of plastic bags is one solution that some jurisdictions have suggested could be effective. I'm not saying that it is or isn't. It's just one of many solutions that we need to take very seriously and consider implementing in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hehr: Well, I thank you. To the Minister of Environment again. That's one answer, but when can we expect, then, some type of leadership on this issue? If you're thinking about it, planning for it, can we get some leadership on this issue to eliminate plastic bags?

Mr. Renner: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have worked in conjunction with my colleagues the environment ministers from all the provinces in Canada through the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment to have an overall review and update of all packaging in this province, not just plastic bags, not just grocery bags but all forms of packaging, because, frankly, it's a much bigger issue than a simplistic solution of banning plastic bags.

Mr. Hehr: Well, maybe Turner Valley got ahold of these people before you did, but I guess that's another measure.

Can we look at the sort of \$25 million spent on this greenwashing campaign, and can you not admit that it may be better served by implementing a ban on plastic bags or other products right here in the province right now instead of spending this \$25 million on advertising?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's not very often that I envy someone in opposition, but it's days like this when I say, "I wish I could come up with simplistic solutions to very complex problems" because they're so good at it. Unfortunately, I have to implement them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Community Development Trust Fund

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and the federal government recently announced creation of the community development trust fund to assist people in communities affected by the volatility in the economic markets. My constituents in the hard-hit forest sector are interested in accessing those funds. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Enterprise. Will she explain how the money can be allocated?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the money, some \$104 million, has already been deposited in Alberta bank accounts. We will use it for increasing training and skills, especially for workers affected. Forestry workers who may be laid off might be an example. Aboriginal people who require work and entry into the workforce also may be affected in some of these communities. It's not a fund that will help individuals, but it will help communities make decisions about that. Investments to strengthen communities is the dominant mission of this fund.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Will the federal government funding provided recently to Alberta for mountain pine beetle also be available to offset community impacts of infestations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the community development trust fund may be used to offset the economic and social effects of pine beetle on forestry-dependent communities, but it cannot be used to fight the spread of pine beetle itself. However,

the federal government also recently announced another \$8 million transfer to Alberta that is targeted at fighting the spread of pine beetle, and that will be used to assist us in the \$85 million that we spent last year and the \$55 million that we have programmed for this year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What measures is Alberta putting in place to help communities overcome economic hardship in the forest sector?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, the primary thrust of our assistance to help communities that are impacted by pine beetle will be to work with the forestry sector itself in both long-term and short-term actions. It will help them overcome the global downturn in their market. We recognize that we don't have any control over the global forces that have caused this significant depression in the forestry industry, but we believe we can create better business conditions in the province of Alberta that will assist these forestry companies and help the communities that are impacted.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Senior Official Vehicle Fleet

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2006 none of the government ministers who were offered an executive vehicle assignment chose a hybrid or low-emission vehicle. Documents tabled in this House attest to that. My question is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Will the minister tell this Assembly whether things have changed since 2006, or do ministers still drive the same inefficient vehicles?

2:10

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, the fleet that Service Alberta manages right now is made up of about 3,450 vehicles. It's really important to note that many of those vehicles are trucks and vans and SUVs that are required to work in all parts of Alberta. I can say, however, that with respect to hybrid vehicles and some of those vehicles, we are moving in that direction, and it is certainly the intention of this department.

Mr. Kang: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about executive vehicle assignments only.

To the minister again. A government memorandum I intend to table shows that senior officials are provided \$43,500 to buy any vehicle they choose. Why not show real leadership and set fuel efficiency standards for these vehicles?

Mrs. Klimchuk: Mr. Speaker, for vehicles that deputy ministers, ministers, and officials like that can purchase, there is a choice in that area with respect to hybrid vehicles. That is definitely being considered in terms of the requirements that they need for their vehicle in their particular department.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again. This government recently pledged \$25 million to a public relations scheme. Will Service Alberta hide behind this new image, or will

it commit to meaningful fuel efficiency standards for executive vehicle assignments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Klimchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This initiative is currently within Service Alberta. The vehicles that we are moving towards will be hybrid vehicles, as many as we can. I can say that the current Minister of Environment does have a hybrid vehicle, and that's something that we should all strive for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Farm Recovery Plan

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of my constituents who farm are struggling with high input costs and low prices. While the farm recovery plan was created to help our agricultural producers, I'm hearing that some farmers have not seen any benefits from this program. I am told it has to do with a difference in fiscal year-ends. To the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: is it true that some producers are not benefiting, and can the minister explain what the problem is?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The farm recovery plan is designed to provide immediate support. The most recent and best information was used, which, of course, was the 2006 CAIS applications. But because CAIS is based on income tax returns, assessments of producers using early year-ends may not have reflected the significant margin declines in some cases.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does this mean that because some producers have chosen early fiscal year-end programs, they are shortchanged every year by available support programs?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you. No, Mr. Speaker, that is not necessarily the case, but it must be noted that there have been some previous programs that have worked to the advantage of those with the early fiscal year-end.

We designed the farm recovery plan using a margin adjustment for those with an early fiscal year. Their assessment, of course, included their previous year's fuel, fertilizer, and feed expenses. I believe that it's a reasonably responsive program and that those with the greatest needs certainly receive the greatest benefit. In fact, we've pumped out \$162 million to this point.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: if the farm recovery program is not triggering for these early fiscal year-end producers, what other kind of help can these hard-working Albertans expect if they did poorly in 2006?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, Mr. Speaker, AFSC has a number of different financial programs, including crop insurance, of course;

loans; and CAIS, now called AgriStability. Alberta is certainly seeking at this time at the federal-provincial-territorial level a review of the new business risk management programs to ensure they work for producers. AFSC is also working very hard to get some advance AgriStability payments out to the producers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the weekend the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports made some comments regarding PDD programs, stating things such as that too many services are provided and that the system needs an overhaul. These comments could certainly use a bit more context. Could the minister specify which program she had in mind and what drew her to those conclusions?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, remember that your estimates are coming up this afternoon, so stick with policy, not budget items. Go ahead.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a new minister I'm looking at all of the ministry's programs. I'm looking at what services are being provided and how they're being delivered to Alberta citizens. The PDD program must continue to focus on the best possible outcomes for Albertans with developmental disabilities and their caregivers. It's important to look for innovative ways to refresh the program and deliver services in an efficient manner so the program is sustainable for years to come.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The observations and sentiments that you're using, have they been echoed by stakeholders? Are these some of the people that you are actually consulting with?

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, a lot of our stakeholders have come to the conclusion that we can't conquer the problem of a shortage in the labour workforce by dollars alone, so some of our stakeholders have been looking at their programs and reviewing them as well. Some of them are good examples of what can be done by working together to make the programs efficient, effective, and sustainable.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this review be formal, and will it ensure that the overhaul isn't just on the staffing side? I realize that that is a huge problem, but could we also be looking at how it actually is going to affect the recipients? Because we will be having more put into the system.

Mrs. Jablonski: Mr. Speaker, it is my intention that we serve our Albertans and our seniors with needs in the very best way possible. My intention is not to do anything that will harm anyone in any way but to improve situations for them and to improve the outcomes. We haven't decided on an official review yet, but if and when we do, we will be consulting stakeholders.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Student Assistance

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to pretend that the high cost of housing is not an issue. Today the minister of advanced education announced a student assistance package that ignores the two largest costs students face: housing and tuition. Rental listings near the University of Alberta show very few one-bedroom apartments listed for under \$1,200 per month. To the minister of advanced education: why does he continue to ignore the two largest cost issues facing students by failing to address the real cost of housing in his changes to the student living allowance?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we are not ignoring those costs at all. What we announced today was only one part of the affordability framework. That includes a number of areas, one of them being student housing. In fact, we're working with pretty much all of the campuses in the province under the Campus Alberta umbrella to develop innovative ways to bring affordable, good-quality residences to our students on campus. At the University of Alberta we're working with them on the east village as well as the south campus on some very innovative proposals. Bringing the students in to talk to me about it I think is very important.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta already has the lowest university completion rate in Canada, can the minister tell us whether he believes that inviting students to spend more hours in the workforce is a credible way to increase either the quality or accessibility of our postsecondary education?

Mr. Horner: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the affordability framework and the decision to raise the limit on earnings was something that the students brought forward to us as opposed to us imposing it upon them. They see quality of life as they go to school and deal with their workplace issues as well as their school issues as very important to them, so they wanted to see that limit raised, and it was our pleasure to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister has already mentioned, given that numerous student groups have approached this government seeking support for more student housing and that today's announcement is silent on that issue, will the minister commit to taking concrete action on funding for campus student housing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that the student housing will be out of concrete, but I'm certain that we're going to be very innovative as to how we build that housing. I'm certain that the hon. member will stay tuned as we go through this year and look at the projects and bring those projects to fruition throughout the year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Library Funding

Mr. Vandermeer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My local library does a great job for the residents of my community, as do all the provincial libraries. I'm hearing, though, that Alberta libraries would like to receive more funding from the province to support the valuable work they do instead of having to rely on fundraising. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Can the minister clarify why libraries have to rely on fundraising and fees to keep operating?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government is very committed to providing a strong, province-wide library system. Library funding is a partnership between municipalities and the province. The government will be contributing \$18.1 million this year towards the regular operating grant program.

Mr. Vandermeer: Then my final question is to the same minister. What is the plan for the future of Alberta libraries, even more funding?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the government and the public library systems need to work together to give Albertans the libraries they want and deserve. Communities have changed; libraries and the way government supports them have not and haven't been reviewed in recent years. I've started a strategic plan process, and it will be led by a working group. I expect to see directions and improvements and enhancements to the library system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Child Care Funding

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The need for child care spaces in Alberta is urgent. Though the government's targets for new spaces are ambitious, many foresee great difficulty in meeting them soon, especially with a shortage of workers willing to go into the field. Many graduates of early childhood education diploma programs are choosing to go on and get their education degree in order to receive the wages necessary to survive in Alberta's overheated economy. As the Alberta government Commission on Learning endorsed the popular recommendations of optional full-day and junior kindergarten, which would quickly free up more child care spaces, will the Education minister revisit his ministry's decision to withhold support for these recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member asked, I believe, a similar type of question at estimates last week, which is the entirely appropriate place to ask about whether we're going to free up resources, so I'd ask him to go back and read *Hansard*.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm not sure which minister showed up for debate and discussion in QP today.

I'm looking for information. As the government's own commission proposed these recommendations and there are so many other

positive spinoffs to this policy both in regard to education and increasing availability of child care spaces, would the minister please be more definitive on the funding for optional all-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten? Can we have specifics, please?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that was set out in my mandate letter from the Premier was to deal with children at risk. In the context of safe communities, in the context of making sure that every child has a chance to succeed, we have to look right across the board at what wraparound services are available, what we can do to make sure that barriers to success are removed from children. One of those areas that we need to look at is the impact of having junior kindergarten, all-day kindergarten for at-risk students. That's just one of the avenues . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. What I am looking for and what Alberta's parents are looking for is a timeline for when this necessary action will occur. Can the minister provide parents and caregivers with any kind of indication of when these considerations are going to turn into reality?

Mr. Hancock: Well, not at this time, Mr. Speaker. The first thing we have to do is look at the framework in terms of: what are the policy areas that we can proceed in, put it in place to help children at risk, children who need supports in order to be able to come to school ready to learn? We're looking very closely at that. There's a wide variety of areas in which we can operate. One of the options that was recommended by the Learning Commission, a very important one, one that I think bears looking at, is junior kindergarten and all-day kindergarten. But it's one of the options, and we need to look at the variety of tools available to us to help at-risk students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Aboriginal Education

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that the Minister of Aboriginal Relations recently attended a conference of the Alberta School Boards Association that dealt with aboriginal educational issues and closing the gap between the aboriginal outcomes and the nonaboriginal. I'm wondering if the minister might just advise us what gaps have been identified and what's being done to close those gaps.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, one of the major gaps that was identified was with respect to educational outcomes. In fact, according to Canada Census 2006 42 per cent of aboriginals in Alberta aged 20 to 24 did not complete high school as compared to 16 per cent in the nonaboriginal category. I've mentioned this point to my federal counterpart, and I've also urged him to take a look at increasing the tuition funding for on-reserve students so that some of those inequities as perceived can be addressed. I've also spoken with the hon. Minister of Education.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Olson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I could address the supplemental to the Minister of Education. I'm just wondering if he has any information about student test scores, high school completion rates, and so on, that he could advise us on.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have implemented an aboriginal learner data collection initiative, which promises to provide reliable data on aboriginal student achievement. We're in the early stages. The data that we have now does indicate gaps, but I would be hesitant to provide that information until we've been able to ensure its reliability.

I'd also like to indicate that this is a classic area where we need to be very careful about how we do assessment because appropriate ways of assessment for one person may not be the appropriate and reliable way for another person. So we need to be careful that we do it right and that we have reliable data.

Mr. Olson: One more supplemental for the Minister of Education. It's my understanding that about five years ago the Commission on Learning offered about 15 recommendations relating to aboriginal education, and I'm just wondering if those have been acted on. Have all of them been acted on, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Education has initiated work on all 15 of the recommendations from the Learning Commission in this area. Many of them have been fully implemented with ongoing initiatives established, while some, like the centre for excellence in aboriginal education, are still under development. Much of the ongoing work of these recommendations is guided by the priorities identified in the department's FNMI education policy framework, but I can say that we have an extensive infusion of aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. We have aboriginal studies 10, 20, 30 courses developed. We have language programs for Cree and Blackfoot . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Federal Infrastructure Funding

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in the House, on April 24, the hon. President of the Treasury Board stated, "We have the deal done, and it is simply a case now of mailing the document back and forth." My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. When the Prime Minister of Canada comes to town on Thursday, will this government sign the building Canada fund and finally get the \$1.8 billion that Alberta is owed from the federal government for needed infrastructure projects?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought that we made it clear last week that this isn't under my ministry. It's under the President of the Treasury Board, so I'll defer to him.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much. Again to the Minister of Infrastructure: how much money can the cities of Edmonton and

Calgary expect to get for the much-needed expansion of their public transit systems from this fund?

Mr. Hayden: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'll have to defer to the President of the Treasury Board as this does not fall under my ministry; it falls under Treasury.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Infrastructure: will the government of Alberta force the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary to use this money for construction projects through the flawed P3 formula?

Mr. Hayden: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how I can be any plainer. This does not fall under my ministry; it falls under Treasury.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:30 Career and Technology Studies

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Minister of Education announced \$79 million in funding for the career and technology studies program. He made this announcement at St. Joseph school in Edmonton, a school which is well known for its impressive CTS facilities and programs. However, not every school board has the capacity to offer that sort of instruction. Why isn't the minister doing more to ensure that students all across Alberta have access to a broad range of CTS courses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted that we have a class from St. Joseph's in the gallery today, and I'm delighted that the hon. Premier was able to join us this morning in making a very important announcement relative to \$79 million going into the CTS area, some of it over the next three years to develop curriculum programming and implementation but a lot of it to assist in building the equipment base that's needed in our labs and schools across the province to be able to deliver that curriculum.

Mr. Benito: Again to the Minister of Education. We both know about the shortage of skilled workers in this province for several years now. Why doesn't the minister stop dragging his feet and introduce the new CTS curriculum before September 2009?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have some very good programs in the province, including the registered apprenticeship program, which are working now to help students who want to get a leg up on their apprenticeship to get out to get some work experience and to be work-ready as well as continue their education. Revamping the CTS curriculum, however, is extremely important, to make sure that we refine that, do a better job of it, and make sure it's available consistently across the province. That's what we're doing. It's complex, it's important, it's significant, and it needs to be done appropriately. We will begin in the fall of 2009 with the introduction of two career clusters.

Mr. Benito: My final question to the same minister. All our students deserve equal learning opportunities. What is the govern-

ment doing to ensure that rural students enrolled in CTS courses have access to the same work experience opportunities that their urban counterparts have?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, we are rolling out the first career clusters: trades, manufacturing, and transportation being the first one and business, administration, finance, and information technology being the second. Then by the fall of 2010: health, recreation, and human services. Natural resources and media, design, and communication arts will follow.

In terms of making sure they're available across the province, we have to make the best use of our distributed learning opportunities and our digital technologies. Also, we're looking at regional centres to ensure that there is the appropriate lab equipment and opportunities available and, of course, rolling labs and co-operating with the colleges . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Class Sizes

Mr. Bhardwaj: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over five years ago Alberta's Commission on Learning recommended establishing class size limits at each grade level. While the government has achieved its goals for grades 4 through 12, average sizes are still above the commission's guidelines for kindergarten through grade 3. Can the Minister of Education tell us why our youngest children are still, five years later, in classes that are too big?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question. We're working across the board to reduce class sizes, and it has to be clear that there is no one-size-fits-all that fits this. We still have challenges in the K to 3 area, and there are a couple of reasons for that: the shortage of classroom space, unanticipated enrolment growth, and teacher availability. We rely on the school boards to make the best choices about their local needs, and this approach has enabled boards to make significant progress in reducing class size. We're addressing the challenges to small class size through investment in new schools and steel-frame modular classrooms.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My experience as a teacher is that this problem has been around for a long time. Is the government going to do anything to ensure that every school district is able to meet the Learning Commission's class size recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have certainly been working over the past five years to meet the commission's class size targets, which this government accepted. We've invested \$729 million in reducing class sizes, resulting in the hiring of more than 2,700 new teachers across the province. The Learning Commission recommended that over five years we should provide \$137.8 million and hire 2,200 teachers. So we're well ahead of what was recom-

mended, and we're continuing that commitment within the budget. We increased funding to the small class size initiative by 9 per cent, or \$17.5 million.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister, my last supplemental: since class sizes are so important for learning, especially in the youngest grades, why will the government not specify a maximum class size and fund our school systems accordingly?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear that there are significant pitfalls with simply specifying a maximum. Jurisdictions are in the best position at the local school level to arrange classrooms and class composition to take advantage of school strengths and community resources and to ensure that the educational needs of each student are met. The hon. member might know that the ATA's report to the Learning Commission indicated:

In practice, imposing strict limits on class size could force schools to adopt classroom configurations that do not effectively meet the needs of students, teachers and communities. This is why Alberta teachers have refrained from recommending legislated caps on class size.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Education Property Tax

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why did the education property tax increase by 5.2 per cent this year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In actuality the education property tax went down. In fact, it went down by in the neighbourhood of 10 per cent. However, because of the increase in the assessment base, which means the total number of businesses and homes and what they are worth, we are seeing and we are collecting more. Stable funding for education is important. The system of supporting education through property taxes and general revenue is a good balance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question to the same minister: why do seniors need to pay more in education property taxes?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, seniors don't. Seniors are responsible for paying the full amount of their education property taxes. Senior homeowners are then eligible to recover any increase over their 2004 education property tax bill. The system of supporting our education system through property taxes and general revenue, again, is a good balance and stable revenues.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question to the same minister: why do seniors have to pay education property taxes at all?

Mr. Danyluk: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a good question. Education is an investment that improves the overall quality of life for all Albertans, including seniors. This investment goes right back into the communities, where we are developing our future doctors, pharmacists, engineers, teachers, farmers, MLAs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Promoting Active Living and Healthy Eating

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Childhood obesity rates are growing at epidemic proportions in Alberta despite increased awareness among the medical community and the public. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is being done to counteract this alarming trend affecting our children and youth?

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, promoting wellness among all Albertans is a priority of our government, but it's especially important with children and youth. There are a number of initiatives that our department is working on, and many of those were released as part of our health action plan, including by the 15th of June nutrition guidelines for children and youth. We'll help support daycares, schools, and recreation centres in providing healthy food choices for our children.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness, my first supplementary question. A \$5 million pilot project, the Alberta project promoting active living and healthy eating, APPLE, funded by an anonymous donor, has been launched in 10 Alberta schools to target obesity and low levels of exercise among children. Does this government approve of such a program?

2:40

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we support all programs that are intended to encourage and motivate our children and youth to eat healthy and be more physically active. This particular pilot project is being led by the University of Alberta School of Public Health. There's a lot of good work that's going on in the education system. I remember a visit I had in my former portfolio to the Black Gold school division, which has a childhood obesity intervention program, and they've won national awards for their work.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Sarich: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the minister planning to do in his action plan on health to reduce obesity rates amongst Alberta's children and youth?

Mr. Liepert: Well, we don't have time in 30 seconds, Mr. Speaker, to go through a number of the initiatives, but I think one of the most important initiatives is the Premier's appointment of parliamentary assistants. I'm fortunate to have the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark as our parliamentary assistant for Health and Wellness. We have tasked him with promoting healthy eating and active living among our children and youth, and he's going to be kept very busy.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that was 112 questions and answers. The hon. Minister of Energy, in responding to questions over the

weekend, requested permission to clarify an answer from the other day, Thursday last. Now, our policy is that I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Energy. He will supplement the answer to a question he gave the other day. That allows a member of the opposition to ask one additional question.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for affording me the opportunity here this afternoon to clarify a statement that I made in this Assembly on Thursday last. The statement was regarding nuclear energy and the Sierra Club. I have since learned it was incorrect. As soon as I learned that the statement was incorrect, I called the director of the Sierra Club and expressed regret for the error and assured her that it was not done with intent. Today I just want to take the opportunity to correct the record in the Assembly as well. I understand that the Sierra Club does not operate in Europe and does not support nuclear energy. My statement that this organization took out ads in Europe was, in fact, wrong.*

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that clarification from the hon. minister. My question to him now is this: what role does General Electric play in the promotion of the nuclear industry in this province?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I have not had any connection with General Electric with respect to its involvement in any industry relative to nuclear in or out of the province of Alberta, so I'm unable to supply an answer to that question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll now return to the section of the Routine that we were on, and in 30 seconds from now I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to provide a member's statement.

In the interim might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the consideration. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you some guests in the public gallery who are here to observe and listen to the budget debate on Seniors and Community Supports and who are in support of a seniors' advocate: Michael Marlowe, former president of the Alberta Retired Public Employees Society; Albert Opstad, former president of the Alberta Seniors United Now Society; Al Romanchuk, former mayor of the city of Grande Prairie; Lou Broten, a 94-year-old senior who is a columnist for the *Edmonton Senior* newspaper; Marie Dube, a public service retiree; and Keith Johnson, a senior retiree. I would ask that they all rise again and receive the welcome of this Legislature.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Lions Club Volunteer Awards

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being a member of the Lions

Club, I'm pleased to rise and speak about the 11th anniversary of the Lions Pride in the Community celebration last Saturday in Calgary. With the motto We Serve, the Lions clubs are known around the world for their volunteering service in many communities around the globe. The individuals honoured at the event are non-Lions volunteers from different communities in Calgary. They are examples of the many outstanding volunteers who make Calgary the volunteer capital of Canada.

The Lions clubs in Calgary have submitted the names of these individuals to the Lions Pride committee for selection and recognition. Our Premier and Mrs. Stelmach were the guests of honour at the event and took part in presenting the Lions Pride award to the deserving recipients.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating these individuals: Esther McIntosh from the Bowness Lions Club, Kim Min Sik from the Calgary Korean Lions Club, Genevieve Marie Agnew from the Calgary (Heritage) Lions Club, Barb Higgins and Doug Haughey from the Northeast Eyeopener Lions Club, Dave Brown from the Calgary North Hill Lions Club, Mike Spector from the Calgary Properties Lions Club, Bob Gray from the Calgary Southridge Lions Club, Benjamin Ang from the Calgary Wildrose Lions Club, Glenn Hamilton from the Calgary Woodcreek Lions Club, and the overall award recipient, Bob Gray. To these individuals and many other volunteers I tip my hat and say thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present. One is calling upon the Alberta government to "commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund."

My other petition is calling upon the Legislative Assembly to "pass legislation that will prohibit emotional bullying and psychological harassment in the workplace."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one petition today to present to the Legislature. This petition has been signed by 20 concerned citizens from all across Alberta, and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition that is signed by a number of individuals, most of them from Fort Saskatchewan but also Gleichen and some Edmontonians. They are asking that the government commission an independent and public inquiry into the government's administration and involvement with the LAPP, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition on behalf

*See p. 216, right col., para. 8

of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, Leader of the Official Opposition, signed by individuals residing in Calgary-Varsity, Calgary-North West, and Calgary-Foothills. They as well are asking for an inquiry into the government's involvement with the LAPP, the public service pension plan, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. It is signed by 40 citizens and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to commission an independent and public inquiry into the Alberta Government's administration of or involvement with the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Public Service Pension Plan, and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund.

This petition is signed by citizens from Slave Lake, Canyon Creek, Kinuso, and various other communities just to name a few.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a couple of petitions to present. Twenty people have signed, and these are predominantly from Calgary. Again it's to commission an independent and public inquiry into the LAPP, the public service pension, and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund.

My other petition has been signed by 412 very forward-thinking students from the University of Lethbridge predominantly, and they are asking and petitioning the Legislative Assembly to

urge the Government of Alberta to appoint a Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform to assess all possible models for electing the Members of the Legislative Assembly, including preferential ballots, proportional representation and our current electoral system. Furthermore, we petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to give the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform a mandate to hold public hearings throughout Alberta, and if it recommends changes to the electoral system, that option [to be made through] a province-wide referendum.

2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today when I did a private member's statement, I referred to a petition which was received in a form that was not in order to be presented, but I did promise to present it as a tabling. I do so now. A good deal of what they wrote I incorporated into the private member's statement that I did, and I now table the five copies of that statement and the corresponding signatures of a number of individuals living in a seniors' complex in the fabulous constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies from five individuals in the Peace River area who are deeply concerned about the risks associated with nuclear power. The letters are from Crystal Reese, Brent Reese, Susanna Kostiuk, Carmen Feduschak, and Brenda Brochu. They are against the proposed nuclear plant in the area and do not believe it will benefit Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings this afternoon. They are letters from constituents. The first one is Mr. Jack Cameron, the second one is Mr. Bob Brisson, followed by Randall Douglas Southworth, Marcia Jurak, and Zane Jurak. All five constituents are writing this afternoon requesting that Alberta's labour laws need at least five significant changes.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The documents I'm tabling today include a memorandum and a double-sided pamphlet from Service Alberta that deals with the \$43,500 provided to senior officials to purchase a vehicle. They are allowed to buy any car that they want, and there are no guidelines about fuel efficiency. This means that a simple way of mitigating the environmental effects of putting these vehicles on the road is being lost.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Cao in the chair]

The Chair: I would call the Committee of Supply to order.

Main Estimates 2008-09

Seniors and Community Supports

The Chair: I would call on the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports to give the opening comments.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin, I'd like to introduce some of my very hard-working ministry staff. With me on the floor are my deputy minister, Tim Wiles, and Susan McCulloch, my director of finance. In the gallery—do you just want to give a wave so we know who you are?—we have Dave Arsenault, the ADM of the community supports programs and strategic planning division. We have Chi Loo, who is the ADM of the seniors' services division; Reegan McCullough, the ADM of the disability supports division; Marilyn Carlyle-Helms, communications director. Many of you know my executive assistant, Pam Livingston. I would like to extend a special welcome to all the seniors that are in the gallery to hear us today, so welcome. It's nice to have you up there.

Mr. Chairman, I'm very pleased to be here to present the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports business plan and budget. As I highlight our programs for this afternoon, you'll see that the ministry is not just about the bottom line; it's also about the people we serve and the way we have developed comprehensive programs that are flexible and responsive to their unique needs.

I believe our business plan ties very well into the overall government plan and goal: to keep Albertans healthy. Our ministry vision is for a vibrant province where all Albertans live with dignity as full participants in society and experience the best possible well-being and independence, and our mission is to enhance the independence, well-being and inclusion of our seniors and persons with disabilities through programs, services, information monitoring, and strategic planning.

Before I talk about our program areas in detail, I'd like to briefly mention our core businesses. The first is to provide targeted

financial assistance. This reflects the work we do on behalf of low-income seniors and persons with disabilities to ensure that they have access to financial assistance that enables them to become as independent as possible. Our ministry's program expense budget for this fiscal year is \$1.9 billion, an increase of \$153 million, or 8.7 per cent, over the '07-08 budget. That's a significant increase in support of our programs, Mr. Chairman.

I'd now like to talk about a key area of our ministry, supports to persons with disabilities. More than \$1.2 billion of our budget is allocated to only two programs: the assured income for the severely handicapped, known as AISH, and the persons with developmental disabilities programs. These are very unique programs because together they help address the unique needs of people with disabilities in our province.

The AISH program provides financial, health-related, and personal benefits to over 36,000 Albertans with disabilities. In January we raised the maximum monthly living allowance to \$1,088 per month. This is the fourth increase in three years, the second increase under our Premier. For '08-09 the AISH budget is \$666 million. The budget will allow us to cover the costs of increasing the monthly financial benefit and the comprehensive health-related benefits package provided to clients, their spouses, and their dependents. As well, as part of the Premier's mandate we will be increasing AISH employment income exemption levels by \$500, which will increase the amount AISH clients can earn while continuing to receive benefits.

That brings me to the persons with developmental disabilities program, or PDD. Our ministry continues our commitment with an increase of \$45 million, or 8.6 per cent, over the '07-08 budget. Total spending for the program will be over \$570 million to help around 9,100 persons with developmental disabilities. In '08-09 funding to PDD contracted agencies will total about \$470 million of the \$570 million budgeted for the program. The balance will directly fund operations such as Michener services and program support. The majority of increased funding will assist contracted agencies to address staff attraction, retention, and compensation issues. Since '05-06 we have invested a total of \$60.3 million in additional funding specifically to help recruit and retain individuals supported by the PDD program. Our government is also working with stakeholders and various ministries to improve our outcomes for individuals while ensuring the sustainability of the system.

3:00

Now I'd like to outline the programs to support Alberta seniors. Funding for seniors' programs will total over \$406 million. These programs include the Alberta seniors' benefit program, the dental, optical, special needs, and the education property tax assistance for seniors. The Alberta seniors' benefit program, which has a budget of \$298 million this year, will increase by almost \$13 million over last year. This program provides low-income seniors with monthly cash payments to supplement the federal income supports programs and/or their personal pensions or savings. This program continues to have one of the most generous monthly cash payments and the highest eligibility thresholds of any provincial financial support program for seniors.

Some of the new funding will be used to address caseloads, which we expect to increase slightly this year. However, most of the increase will provide increased benefits to low-income seniors in long-term care and designated assisted living facilities in order to reduce the impact of long-term care rate increases.

The special-needs assistance for seniors program is also available to low-income seniors. This program assists eligible seniors with one-time or extraordinary expenses such as appliances, essential minor home repairs, and some medical expenses. The budget for

this program is \$25 million, and approximately 24,000 seniors will receive benefits in '08-09.

I'm also pleased to report that we are increasing the dental and optical assistance programs by almost \$3 million, or 4.5 per cent. These programs have made such a difference in our province, so much so that more than 245,000 seniors are eligible for support from these two programs.

Under the education property tax assistance program we project that \$11 million budgeted for this will provide rebates to approximately 63,000 seniors' households in '08-09.

As you know, the Premier has given me a mandate to improve the supply, choice, and quality of long-term care in our province in conjunction with the Minister of Health and Wellness. We have allocated \$5.9 million this budget year to improve the quality of accommodation services in the continuing care system. This funding will go towards implementing the standards in long-term care facilities and lodges, monitoring for compliance, licensing, and investigating complaints. When you consider continuing care, there is a full range of options available to Albertans, from lodges to assisted living to long-term care.

I'm also very pleased that the budget also includes \$80 million to fund affordable supportive living projects in our communities. The affordable supportive living program, ASLI, will provide grants for affordable supportive living projects that serve the housing and support needs of seniors and persons with disabilities and promote aging in the community. We expect that about 800 supportive living units will be constructed using the \$80 million available. This is in addition to approximately 4,900 affordable supportive living units that are either in progress or already completed through more than \$248 million in capital funding since 1999. That answers the last question that the member earlier asked me in question period.

Seniors' lodges are an important part of the continuing care framework in Alberta. Through the lodge assistance program we provide grants on behalf of nearly 86 per cent of seniors living in provincially supported lodges. That funding helps lodge operators address increasing operating costs while ensuring that the program continues to support low- and moderate-income seniors. This year the total spending will be more than \$32 million. The budget also recognizes the need to ensure that the lodge facilities themselves are up to date and will meet clients' needs. The budget includes \$15.6 million to help modernize and improve some of the publicly funded seniors' lodges to meet the needs of current and future residents.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Congratulations to the minister from Red Deer-North on her first ministry. As a shadow minister for this ministry I am pleased, and I have what I believe is a good working relationship with this minister. Do we agree on everything? Absolutely not, but I really believe that the work we do together is good for Alberta.

Thank you very much for the overview of the direction this ministry is taking. I will try to keep my remarks to this ministry, but sometimes it becomes difficult because there's such an overlap with care, education, and employment. I don't always necessarily like to talk about huge amounts of money because once I've gotten past the first billion, I kind of get a little confused. What I'd really like to know is how the money has been performed and if the objectives have an evaluation process to answer that question.

I'd like to start my questions with, surprisingly, asking why AISH is not indexed as are MLAs' salaries. I didn't see anything in the budget to address that. I believe that a review every two years really

isn't necessarily fair. We encourage AISH recipients to work as much as they can, and that is very, very sound thinking, but we all know what a killer of motivation depression and no hope can be. I believe that people who feel secure in knowing that they can budget and that inflation or unscrupulous landlords will not eat up whatever they may or may not get are far more likely to have the motivation and the security to be able to go out of their comfort zone. My question really is: how do we allow these people to have that security? I believe that security is partly based on the fact that they're not always thinking and wondering: "How much money am I going to get? Am I going to get it, or am I not going to get it? Why do I have to wait?" Even then it may not be tied to anything that actually is reflective of society. So I'd like to know what the reasoning is, actually, behind not having anything indexed and if that discussion is ever going to come forward.

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, thank you for that question and those comments. We understand the pressures that accompany a booming economy and how those pressures can place an extra strain on our AISH clients. There are over 36,700 clients, and each of them may have a different range of needs. In January '08 the AISH financial assistance rate was increased to \$1,088. This represents the fourth increase in four years. As part of the MLA recommendations on April 1, 2005, the maximum monthly AISH benefit increased from \$850 to \$950, then to \$1,000 in April '06 and to \$1,050 on April 1, 2007.

The AISH program provides a comprehensive list of supports in addition to the monthly financial benefit of \$1,088 per month. Clients are eligible to access a wide range of health-related benefits, including premium-free Alberta health care insurance, prescription drugs, eye care, dental care, emergency ambulance services, essential diabetic supplies, and a waiver of Alberta Aids to Daily Living copay fees. These health-related benefits are available not just for the AISH client but also for the AISH client's spouse and any dependent children and are worth on average over \$350 per month per client.

Many clients also have access to personal benefits which help them meet ongoing needs or one-time needs, such as special diets, caring for guide animals, child school expenses or the initial cost of caring for a new baby, special transportation costs such as to medical appointments. Clients also receive financial assistance for basic medical equipment and supplies through the Aids to Daily Living program so they can function more independently at home, in lodges, or in group homes. There are, also, approximately 9,000 AISH clients who receive supports from our persons with developmental disabilities program.

3:10

Clients can also earn extra employment income and keep full benefits; for example, \$400 right now for a single AISH client plus 50 per cent of any income up to \$1,000 for a total exemption of \$700 per month, \$975 for a single parent or couple plus 50 per cent of income up to \$2,000 for a total exemption of \$1,488 per month. We also recently announced an increase to the amount of money AISH clients can earn while continuing to receive benefits. We will be implementing this increase in the next two to three months. With the upcoming increase in the next few months these maximum exemptions will increase by \$500, to \$1,500 for singles and \$2,500 for couples.

AISH clients, like all Albertans, are also able to access housing, employment, educational, and recreational supports from other ministries and other levels of government. My ministry is working

with other government ministries, Housing and Urban Affairs, to help clients address additional supports such as the homeless and eviction prevention fund. This fund can help Albertans with short-term assistance to prevent them from becoming homeless or to establish a residence or ongoing assistance with rent shortfall. This information is available on the AISH information line at 1-866-477-8589.

On indexing, we have committed to reviewing the AISH financial benefit rate every two years.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that. Not for a minute do I not think that this program is generous in many ways, and I'm really hoping that the thrust behind it to help people get out and work is actually realized. However, I guess I will never give up on my wanting AISH indexed because I think what AISH in a way covers is that really basic need of housing and food. I think that when those things are taken care of, then one's mind can expand and, as I mentioned before, leave the comfort zone.

One of the other things that I would like to ask about that I haven't really seen in the budget is the ongoing conversation that I've been having with many seniors groups and actually brought forward in my Bill 205 about a year and a half ago. They are really looking for a seniors' advocate, somebody that they can go to when they are certainly feeling frustrated with some of the programs that are being delivered or, in fact, the way they are being delivered.

Also, some of this comes out of many of the concerns in long-term care. Now, to be fair, a lot of those concerns really are on the care side, which is not this ministry's responsibility. However, there is a bit of an overlap, and the seniors' advocate that I believe they're asking for really would cover the whole gamut of seniors' issues. We have independent seniors with issues such as living in their homes, increased taxes, and certainly increased utilities, but regardless of how dependent they are or how old they are, the minute that seniors need care, they then go under a different umbrella, which is continuing care, and that of course has many, many facets to it.

I would like to ask the question about the feeling of having a seniors' advocate. I know that there is the Protection for Persons in Care Act and also the Health Facilities Review Committee, but what I'm hearing is that they do not have the teeth that are required. They really don't have the mandate to make a difference. Yes, they can make recommendations. But there isn't any clout behind them. There really needs to be further legislation to either give those groups more authority and actually more enforcement or else have a seniors' advocate that would handle all of those sorts of problems.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I am interested in exploring the concept of a seniors' advocate and looking forward to an open dialogue about our services to seniors. The Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta is currently looking into the area of an advocate, and I expect to receive information about this from the council in the coming months. The ministry strives for good communications with seniors through eight seniors' information services offices throughout the province; the toll-free 1-800 seniors' information line, which fields over 1,000 calls a day; the Seniors Advisory Council; and good relationships with our many service providers.

Mr. Chairman, one of the issues that the member raised is some of the concerns that our seniors have. I am confident in saying that if any of those concerns should be related to senior abuse and should any of that be in a criminal focus or with criminal charges, we have three areas of investigation. First of all, if it is criminal, it goes

immediately to the police, and then the police will do a thorough investigation of the complaint. Secondly, we have two other areas of investigation. We do have the PPC, protection for persons in care, investigative unit within our ministry that also does a thorough investigation. The third one is the Ombudsman for the province, who also has an investigative unit. So as far as the investigative purposes of any complaints that may come forward, I think that we already have a service in place in one of those three areas to help find what the problems are and, hopefully, recommend good results for those areas. You know, I like to take the budget that we have and use it efficiently and effectively, so I don't like the idea of duplication in those areas since we have three effective areas of investigation for any complaints that may come forward from our seniors.

The member also mentioned the Protection for Persons in Care Act and that she would like to see some changes to that act. I am just looking at that act right now, and I'll take that under consideration for the future.

Now, she also mentioned in the beginning of her last question more comments about the AISH program and that it's close to her heart and that she keeps asking the same question, and I appreciate that. One of things that I keep saying in answer to her persistent questioning is that we do have one of the best programs in Canada. I keep saying that, and, Mr. Chairman, I would like to show you that this is one of the best programs in Canada. So I want for comparison purposes to tell you what the financial benefits are in the other provinces.

Now, remember that just our financial benefit is \$1,088 per month, plus we have other benefits that top that up as well. In Newfoundland and Labrador the financial benefit is \$657; in PEI, \$759; in Nova Scotia, \$739; in New Brunswick, \$600. In Quebec it is \$962; in Ontario, \$999; Manitoba, \$756; Saskatchewan, \$816. Of course, on the list is Alberta, which is \$1,088, and in B.C. it is \$906. So, Mr. Chairman, when I say that we have one of the most generous or best programs in all of Canada, that's the chart that tells me that that is so.

Thank you.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you for that. I'm going to just go after it a little bit more, and then I promise I'll let it rest. I do realize that we have good benefits, and I do realize that talking about comparisons is always good. But what I'm talking about is that prior to the last four raises, I think they waited 10 years before it was acknowledged that that had to happen, so they still are a little bit behind in terms of not a living wage but the . . . [interjection] Yeah. Right. Thank you. It's really the reliability of those dollars that I'm talking about, that they know there'll be a chance that, yes, it will and that they aren't sitting waiting every year or two years like: I wonder what's going to happen? So my other question would be: are they indexed in the other provinces? With that, I'll leave that.

On page 26 of the strategic business plan it states that in order to improve the quality, supply, and client choice, the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports will

build on previous grant programs to facilitate the development of affordable, supportive living options and create opportunities for innovation by removing barriers and considering incentives for developing an appropriate range of continuing care accommodation options.

There seems to be an emphasis on supportive living, which is fine because there are options in there. Certainly, it's much better – and the concept is good – compared to when I started in the profession. In the old days there really was no choice. Almost everybody that required any kind of long-term care ended up in a long-term care

facility, and a lot of them really were inappropriately placed because there was nowhere else to go.

3:20

However, my concerns are articulated by persons from all over the province, that in order to cut health region costs in long-term care, the numbers of beds have been reduced by turning them into assisted living beds, some overnight with the stroke of a pen, and the costs were then downloaded to the resident, and they actually received less care. I certainly don't advocate the wrong person in the wrong place. That doesn't work either. It's hard on staff, and it's hard on the people that have been inappropriately placed. But people can be kept out of long-term care beds just by the way they're assessed, and families are usually not a part of that process. There doesn't seem to be any uniform assessment process across the regions. A region can say: look, we don't have a waiting list for long-term care, and supportive living is working just fine. But when, in fact, families beg for long-term care and are usually ignored, often that person will die, and that's the end of the story.

Supportive living staff are more likely not to be trained past personal care worker standards, if that. Often this is where neglect can happen. They just can't cope with the heavy patients or recognize emergent medical conditions because they haven't been trained for that.

Staffing numbers, it goes without saying, is a major problem towards, actually, all aspects of care. Again, I emphasize that I do know that care does not come under this ministry.

One of my questions would be: how do we prevent supportive living options from taking away from long-term care options that are really required by those who are unable to function in a supportive living facility? They often are placed there, and they just cope. I believe that this is where some of the cases of elder abuse do come forward.

Also, seniors – I'll leave it at that because this is a whole separate area.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, in order to address some of the questions from the member opposite, as far as indexing for the AISH program from other provinces, I'm not aware that they do or they don't, so I'll have to find that answer for the member. As far as indexing goes, I've mentioned a number of times in the House that we have increased the financial benefit to AISH members four times in the last three years and twice since our Premier has been Premier. So I think that we are responsive to the needs of our AISH clients, something that we continually monitor.

Going to the continuing care part of the questions, the member did mention a couple times that she's fully aware that anything that is long-term care, including the long-term care assessment, is part of the Health and Wellness department's mandate and not this ministry's. It's my job to ensure that the assisted living facilities are the best that can be provided for our seniors and that we increase the numbers of beds. I think that it's in the Health and Wellness mandate that we are going to increase long-term care beds by 600. That was one of the things that had been brought forward.

In the area of the program that I take care of, the accommodation standards that have been developed include maintenance, house-keeping, food services, social activities, safety and security, and nonmedical personnel services. That is in my mandate. I know that sometimes it can be confusing. The accommodation standards and the developing of the monitoring, licensing, complaints resolution, and training processes involved extensive consultation and collaboration with supportive living and long-term care providers, Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Justice, regional health authorities, and

other stakeholders. They were all involved in the accommodation standards and the development of the monitoring and the licensing.

Many Albertans will benefit from these new provincial accommodation standards, especially as the number of persons living in the continuing care system increases. About 21,000 people live in over 700 supportive living facilities, including our lodges, enhanced lodges, designated assisted living, group homes, adult family living, and family care homes. About 14,000 people live in approximately 200 long-term care facilities, including our auxiliary hospitals and nursing homes.

The Chair: We just finished the combination of 20 minutes between the minister and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: I'm up again.

The Chair: Okay. The Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You were speaking of the standards and the legislation. I actually am looking for legislation that would implement the standards that have already been articulated and actually are written down. My problem with some of those are effective monitoring and the enforcement mechanism that comes behind that. I think that was probably what I alluded to before in terms of the Health Facilities Review Committee. Really, they can make recommendations; they don't have any authority to make changes. Again, in fairness, a lot of the complaints that are my concerns are really under the care side.

Accreditation. Many of our facilities are certainly being accredited, which is great. It's fine, and the paperwork and all the words are there. But I really think that sometimes unannounced checks should be mandatory for this group, especially if there has been a complaint. However, as I've said, the complaints are seldom against housing. They're often on the care side. But sometimes complaints can be food, cleanliness, and, unfortunately, just the whole social neglect sometimes of people who live in these big, big buildings with many, many residents.

I've always used the story of the grandma who moves into what can be assisted living or supportive living or whatever. She's basically fine but frail. She can go down to the dining room by herself and basically look after herself with morning care and evening care. But now, all of a sudden, she's had a bit of a stroke, and she requires help to get to the dining room. It is still under the ministry of seniors. But now we've got grandma sitting at the table, and she can't feed herself. All of a sudden it's switched over to the ministry of health because who is going to feed this woman to keep her alive?

The other thing that comes under housekeeping, it appears, in some of the places that I've visited is sort of what they call health care workers, and they really are sort of multitasking. But do they really understand that when they put a glass of orange juice beside whomever in their room, and they're diabetic, that they have to drink it? They just go and place it. There's really no oversight on whether this person has actually taken that nourishment that is required to keep their diabetes under control. So I'm looking for legislation and standards. I know that it's hard to do, but we do need them so that when people go in and assess it, they've got legislation behind them to be able to do more than make recommendations.

Protection for persons in care again I believe is not under your department. I'm sorry; I think it is because there was an increase. On page 327 line 4.1.4 of the estimates shows that there's a 40 per cent increase. I want to know exactly what that money is going to be used for in PPIC to ensure that these people actually have a

chance to be heard and that they're not going to end up frustrated with just recommendations. Most of these people could write their own recommendations because they know what's really wrong. So I'd like to know where that money is being used and legislation to implement the standards. My other question would follow along: are the standards the same for private and public, and who enforces if it's private or public?

3:30

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In response to the questions asked by the Member for Lethbridge-East, I want you to know that we do surprise visits. We've included that now in our inspection system. If we cite anybody for problems that may be in cleanliness, in housekeeping, or in food, we give them a time period when we expect them to improve, and then we go back. We monitor to see if they've made those improvements, so we work with them. In the end, if they don't want to respond to what we've asked them to do to meet the standards that are necessary, we have the authority to close them down. So it's in their best interests to work with us and the standards and to provide for the needs of our seniors in assisted care.

There is the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, that the member mentioned. We are thinking about reviewing it, as you mentioned, to update it. You did tell us that you were aware that a lot of the care standards are up to our Health and Wellness department to ensure that the health care standards are kept, but the other standards we inspect for. We cite if there's any problem. We go back to ensure that they've improved the areas that we've asked them to improve.

You asked about the budget line item for protection of persons in care and what the increases went to. The increase of \$1.115 million consists of a prior approval of a \$1 million increase to address the increased workload from legislative amendments and \$115,000 for manpower cost increases. Generally, the increase is going towards manpower. As we know, that's one of our biggest issues in Alberta these days. Certainly, we're very affected by that in our assisted care programs and looking after our seniors.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I just would ask that next time – and I'll do a couple more questions – you address the difference between public and private and how you can actually do those standards.

Another thing that I would like to be able to see is that when the standards are there, they actually are for the province. I think that ever since the MLA task force, I've been saying that we really need standardized standards across the province. I'll use an example. It is partly the assessment, which is sort of on the care side. But some regions or some organizations can say: this is the kind of care you need; therefore, this is where you're going to live. It's almost a group decision, but the families are often not involved.

One of the issues that I had was that I actually had a man come to my office. He was an only child. He had two parents in Calgary, both of whom had been assessed as long-term care. One was bedridden, and the other one was immobile in a wheelchair. He really wanted them close to him, but our region would not assess them as long-term care, and he couldn't afford putting them into supportive living and picking up the extra cost. So I'm looking for standardization when people move across this province. Particularly, we must be encouraging families to be able to make it easy for them to bring their parents home so that they have a better chance of looking after them. Really, no one can look after family the same as family. If we can make it easy for families to bring home whoever it is that they're responsible for, I think that that's important.

One of the things there also is is confusion among seniors and their families when it comes to identifying and understanding the basket of services and the levels of care that are provided in homes. Again, it's not the same across the province. A consistent, province-wide classification is required in order to eliminate the confusion. Terms such as "assisted living," "lodges," "supportive living" have to be clearly defined. In fairness, I do know that the definitions are getting closer and getting clearer. It's the way they're interpreted that sometimes causes that confusion. The government must also require that all homes outline in unambiguous terms who's responsible for the cost and the delivery of these services, and systems must be in place so that residents and families know what level of care to expect and can decide what type of facility would best meet their needs and, again, not through an arbitration process.

One of the things that I would like to speak about is the fact that certainly not everyone is equal and not all care is equal. However, there are some assisted living facilities that when you move in, it's X number of dollars – and I'll use the instance of \$1,585 a month – but should you want something extra, here's the menu that you can choose from. I won't read the whole thing, but should you want an extra bath for 30 minutes, it's \$9 a month. If you need to be dressed in the morning and the evening to be put to bed, it's \$135 a month.

If you need to be fed for 20 minutes times three times daily, it's \$360 a month. I can assure you, after all my experience of feeding people in long-term care, that 20 minutes doesn't even come close to touching it even if they're on puréed food. Their attention span is lower, and also they don't swallow as fast, so 20 minutes is a pretty quick meal. The only good thing about it is that probably the food is still hot during that time.

Should someone want medication, it's \$50 a month, and often that is not given out by someone who can actually sign that it's been taken. What it says is: I have given it to them; they've taken the pills and put them beside them. It's only, basically, an RN or an LPN that can sign that, yes, it's been taken, because they ensure that that pill has gone down.

If people need help with extra mobility to the dining room and return three times daily, that's \$270 a month.

But this is the one that I think is the worst. I don't know about anybody in this House, and to be sort of crass about it, I'm not sure who really goes to the toilet necessarily on cue. However, for \$90 a month they will toilet you for 10 minutes a day. So you better be ready to go in those 10 minutes.

My questions would follow along. I believe that some sort of website should be created. Is this being looked at by the department? I guess the other question about the department would be: has this conversation gone on in terms of having standardized definitions and actually being able to enforce them and to really get that information out? It is very, very confusing, especially for elderly who don't have family in that particular city. They really are at the mercy of the public employee.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is really a difficult area because, as the member knows, she crossed over into the Health and Wellness area. Anything that's a health care issue is in Health and Wellness. We are the accommodation standards that we have to refer to. So I would like to address some of that and talk about some of the issues.

We believe that we're making good progress on improving choice for Albertans through a new website, so we're addressing some of these issues that the member mentioned on a website that will help them make informed decisions about selecting a supportive living facility. The website will identify supportive living facilities by

community, and it provides details on licensing, inspection results, verified complaints – these are all on the website – and a facility's overall compliance with the accommodation standards and plans to address deficiency. Any person in Alberta or anywhere can go on the website and look up a facility and see if there have been any recent inspections, if there have been any requirements for improvements, if there have been any complaints. They can see where some of the facilities may have made improvements or where there are extra good facilities for them to attend. So that's already on the website.

Our accommodation standards are standardized across the province. We take care of that because we are the central authority for looking after that. But the other standards that you mentioned are standards that are set by the nine different regional health authorities, once again something that is Health and Wellness's mandate.

You talked earlier about the resident who needed to drink her orange juice because she may be diabetic, and does the person who is working with her understand that so that she encourages that resident to drink the orange juice? We have some training standards as well for our accommodations, and we have consultants that are available to visit facilities and assist them in preparing for inspections or to help address specific issues at no charge to the facility. We have orientation sessions – these are training things – to the long-term care standards. Those sessions were held in some regional health authorities prior to the commencement of the monitoring of the long-term care facilities. Training was conducted in nine communities across the province to help supportive living and long-term care operators implement our accommodation standards. So we're trying to work with them to ensure that we have the best care possible for our seniors.

3:40

Ms Pastoor: Thank you again for that. But, actually, the menu that I wrote out in terms of the care does come under housing.

I guess I will keep on going.

The Chair: Member, you have finished the 20 minutes. Now we go into the 10 minutes, back to when I recognize each member.

Ms Pastoor: All right. Then I will yield the floor to my colleague from Edmonton-Centre.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms Blakeman: I hadn't prearranged this with the minister, but I am willing to do a 20-minute exchange and combine our times if she's willing to do that. Could I get the table to set the timer for the 20? Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I'm very glad to be able to be participating in the estimates debate for the Department of Seniors and Community Supports. Just a couple of things that have arisen as I work my way through the actual documentation. I'm referring specifically to the information in the document Budget 2008, ministry business plans, appearing on page 224. I notice that the government of Alberta goal as it relates to the ministry services includes "implement accommodation standards for supportive living and long-term care facilities" and, later, "encourage public, private, and non-profit housing sectors to develop supportive living options that serve identified community needs through approved capital funding."

We've heard quite a bit of conversation about how we're not asking questions that are under the ministry's supervision directly, so perhaps the minister could enlighten us as to what "implement accommodation standards" actually means and whether "encourage

public, private, and non-profit housing” actually means to develop the housing, or if it’s not, what is this? Some sort of cheerleading effort from the sidelines? One of my ongoing criticisms is that we have cross-ministry issues here, but I don’t see a lot of cross-ministry co-operation. I think that might be what’s happening here.

I will refer the minister to page 225 of the same fiscal business plan. Under the section Significant Opportunities and Challenges, number 2, New Technologies Increase Independence, it goes on to talk about how advances in medical equipment and more effective drugs can significantly improve the quality of people’s lives. But this runs counter to the experience that I think many MLAs have had in this House of a drug coming on the market and the expert drug committee through the Department of Health and Wellness refusing to fund it. So what is this department doing to influence or to raise the issues in a very concrete, identifiable, measurable way with the department of health to bring those two things together? On the one hand, this department, which is responsible for seniors and community supports, is supposed to be improving the quality of people’s lives, and the drugs are part of that, yet we have a different department that is turning down the insured coverage for the drugs. Perhaps the minister could explain what appears to be something counterintuitive there.

Actually, I’m going to let the minister respond to that, and then I’ll go on to the next section.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for those questions. The Member for Edmonton-Centre doesn’t disappoint me.

I’m going to start with your last question, which was the funding of the drugs and your reference to the special drug committee. We are having ongoing discussions with Health and Wellness. Once again, that’s their area, but we are supportive of those drugs that we are made aware of that are beneficial to our seniors in assisted living. So, once again, ongoing discussions as far as the drug part is concerned.

Through the ASLI program we have standards that once we give the assisted supportive living initiative grants, we have accommodation standards that anyone who receives a grant is required to meet in order to receive that grant. That’s part of the standards that we require when the grant is granted. That’s how we implement standards, and it is standardized across the province, once again, because we’re the central area where people who want those grants or need those grants apply, and those are granted from this area.

Once again on the drug issue, which is a Health and Wellness question, as you know, we are supportive of any drug that we feel is important for our seniors in assisted living.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I think the point that I was trying to make is: what is the department doing that is measurable to an outsider around influencing the other department? While I appreciate the integrity this particular minister has, well, you know me. I always like to get a little bit of hard copy proof.

I appreciate that this department is talking to the department of health, but how am I as a citizen or, indeed, the friends that have joined us in the gallery, who are pretty smart people, all of them, and who do follow through on things like this, able to measure that? They have no way of actually checking up. There’s nothing

measurable for them to look at about how that is actually happening. Ongoing discussions, quotation marks, are not measurable. I was looking for something a bit more concrete because it appears in your ministry business plans. You clearly understand it. You’re talking about it. It’s in your ministry business plans. It doesn’t say: no, no, not me; it’s them. But I can’t find anything that I can measure.

I heard the minister earlier talk about the number of times that the rates have been raised for those that are on the assured income for the severely handicapped, commonly known as AISH. With all due respect, Minister, I’m not going to give this government a medal for four increases over the past couple of years considering that the last increase was about either \$33 or \$38, and I think they’ve had a total increase in funding on a monthly basis of about \$150, and prior to this set of increases their last increase was about a decade ago. So, you know, although there’s been some attempt to catch up here, I cannot say that this government could be considered by anyone to be overly generous in this particular area.

It’s why people keep talking about indexing it, because there was not a consistent increase that came along that measured with cost of living. When you give them an increase in 1994 and you don’t do anything again until 2006, that money that they were spending in 2004 really had a value of, you know, 11 or 12 years earlier. I’m sorry; when they went to the store, they had to pay 2006 prices for their groceries. They couldn’t go: well, gosh, you know, if you discount for inflation, I really just have money from 1994, and if you’d please accept inflationary costs reduced, that would be great. That doesn’t happen.

So, you know, I’m not willing to give a medal because there were minor increases in AISH. I still think it needs to be indexed, and I think that overall there should be an increase over it. I mean, how does this government expect someone to try and live even in a pretty crappy apartment in downtown Edmonton in not a very great location when \$850 is the going rate for a one-bedroom and they’re pulling down \$1,050 in an AISH payment? I don’t know how you expect these people to live, put food on the table, buy a transit pass, pay for medicine that is not covered under other medical coverage, to pay for additional diabetic supplies for example, vitamin supplements, and things like that.

3:50

Moving on to a different subject, I’m wondering what efforts or concrete plans this department has done to work with the department of health around home care. We keep hearing that we want people to age in place, but I do not see a concerted effort across government departments to make sure that people can age in place. A major component of aging in place is home care if we’re going to keep people in their original family homes or even in a smaller unit they’ve moved to more recently, and the increasing difficulty in securing home care services is quite apparent to me. So, again, what is concrete and measurable that this department has done to influence the department of health around the funding for home care?

Another issue that has been brought up to me a number of times is an independent seniors’ advocate and a secondary advocate specific to assisted living and long-term care facilities. Is the department considering any moves in this direction? Are they bringing forward any legislation or looking at any programs that would establish an independent seniors’ advocate through this department?

I’m also noting in your strategic plan that the ministry is understanding, or purports to, under Significant Opportunities and Challenges, number 4, that “Strong Economy Drives Employment and Rising Costs.” Under that section, appearing on page 226 of the

ministry plans, it does talk about the strong economy resulting in higher living costs.

Many of the Ministry's clients have relatively low or fixed incomes with limited capacity to adjust to the cumulative effect of rising costs . . . rapid escalation of costs for housing, food, utilities and transportation has been particularly challenging.

So the ministry is well aware of the issues that we keep raising.

But I am particularly concerned about what efforts are being made on behalf of people with mental health issues, and I'd like to hear from the minister what she is planning to do in her department over the next year.

Three more issues. Dentures. Are we looking at improved denture coverage under seniors' benefits for dentures? I have never understood how someone is expected to age and at the same time not have their mouths change for dentures. The way that the payment for dentures is set up right now I find quite cruel. You know, for people that don't have the money to pay for this, being told you can have your dentures replaced every five years, every three years seems like an awfully long way away when you've just had a set, and you're six months into it, a year into it, and they're not fitting properly. So I'm wondering if there are any improvements being considered under the denture coverage.

You used to be able to apply under the – you have two funds: one is the seniors' benefit, which is the cash benefit, and then there's the second fund, which was around one-time only grants that were up to \$5,000 extended seniors' benefits. I'm sorry; I'm just not getting the right name of the program. We used to be able to apply for extra money there to pay for dentures, and that was removed a couple of years ago. I'm wondering if that could be restored or if there's another way of people being able to get additional funding, because dentures are expensive. I mean, you're looking at \$3,000, \$5,000, \$6,000 for dentures, and most seniors don't have that kind of coin lying around under the bed. So the dentures.

I'm wondering if the minister has any legislation coming forward this year at all. I'd be interested in hearing what that is.

Finally, when the minister was talking about "we" were doing unannounced checks in some of the facilities, could the minister explain who the we is? Is that the department? Is that the Health Facilities Review Committee? Who is the we? I would argue that the Health Facilities Review Committee has been . . . [interjection] Well, yeah, I don't think they have a lot of credibility anymore, and I wonder how much emphasis is being placed on their work at this point in time.

The seniors' issues that have been raised to me, I raised some of them today in my private member's statement, around difficulty paying the 30 per cent of income, especially when utilities are not included in that, neither is telephone. But also they've raised issues around quality home care, affordable and accessible care facilities. Stop turning long-term care facilities into assisted living, create advisory councils in all seniors' care facilities, and establish an independent seniors' advocate: I've certainly covered some of those. So my questions were specific to home care, seniors' advocate, mental health supports, dentures, legislation coming, and who the we is.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Something that I wasn't able to say because I ran out of time but I'd like to say now for the benefit of our members is that for any answer that I'm not able to give a verbal reply to, we will provide a written reply to the members. We'll get into the questions that the Member for Edmonton-Centre has asked in her last approach.

The first thing she talked about when we were talking about the drug was that she wants something that's measurable. She mentioned that ongoing discussions aren't measurable, and I would agree with that, but we are paying attention to things that are measurable. At this time we might not have anything in place for the drug part, but as I explained before, we do have a website that shows what we're doing in our inspections and who was inspected and what the results of those inspections were. So I would like to point out that we do believe that measurable things should be open and transparent, and we've started a website to deal with that.

Ms Blakeman: And the website address is?

Mrs. Jablonski: That website will be up in three months, and we'll have the address for you then.

The other thing that the member talked about is AISH. I want to mention once again that it is the highest level of financial benefit in the country, that we have the most comprehensive health benefits available to our AISH clients. I also want to mention something I don't think I've mentioned before that I think is really important, that we look at AISH clients as individuals and we do speak with them and have discussions with them to see what their individual needs are. There are areas in our program, as I mentioned earlier, that we have supports for on an individual basis.

When we talk about our AISH clients, I'll just reinforce the fact that in addition to financial benefits our AISH clients are eligible to receive a comprehensive list of health benefits, including free Alberta health care insurance, prescription drugs, eye care, dental care, emergency ambulance, essential diabetic supplies, and the Alberta Aids to Daily Living with no copay fees. These benefits are not only available to the AISH clients themselves but to their spouses and any dependent children. This assistance is worth an average \$350 per month per client. AISH clients who have less than \$3,000 in assets may be eligible for assistance with additional expenses such as caring for service animals, travel to medical appointments, and school supplies.

The next question that the member asked is: what are we doing about home care with Health? As you know, home care does come from Health. That's also an ongoing discussion that we're having. We understand the importance of that. If we want our seniors to stay in their homes as long as possible, we know that that's an issue. The Minister of Health and Wellness mentioned a plan that he called the 3-6-9 plan, and home care is mentioned in that plan. We have to stay tuned for his releases about that health care plan that he is putting into place.

4:00

You mentioned, once again, the seniors' advocate. I would say to you that we do have a seniors' information line and that 1,000 calls, on average, per day are answered. I have said that I'm interested in exploring that idea. I think that we have good representation through the Seniors Advisory Council, who travel throughout Alberta to meet with stakeholder groups to see what the concerns are so that we can hear what they have to say and address those concerns.

The ministry strives for good communication with our seniors. We have eight information offices throughout the province that seniors can walk into at any time. I'd like to tell you about the one that I know best, which is in Red Deer. I think that when the ministry did that a number of years ago, they were forward thinking in the fact that they did not put this seniors' office in a place in downtown Red Deer where parking is difficult and not very accessible for our seniors; they put the seniors' office right in the

middle of our biggest seniors' centre in Red Deer so that it's very accessible for our seniors.

You know, one thing I like about seniors is that they're very supportive of each other. When they get together to chat about what their concerns and issues are, a senior could say to another senior: "Well, there's this program. Don't you know about this program?" And I've seen this in our centre where a senior can immediately go to the centre and speak with a consultant there. So I think that those eight centres are very important for communicating needs to our seniors' programs.

The Chair: Thank you, minister.

Now I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. She indicated that she would like to have 20 minutes between the minister and herself. Go ahead.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to stand up and ask you some questions and get some more information about the many services provided within your ministry. I hope to be able to not replicate too many questions. I am trying to become familiar with all the programs of your ministry, among many others, on sort of short notice. So I do apologize if I'm raising issues that are seen as known by many.

I'm going to try to break my questions down to two areas: essentially that which deals with AISH levels and then the PDD funding, and the second set around seniors' care and supportive living issues. With respect to AISH, of course, I want to start by echoing the comments of some of the previous speakers with respect to the level of payment received by people who live on AISH. I know I've heard a lot about how much it has gone up in the last two or three years; however, I'm wondering the degree to which the ministry has looked at actually bringing AISH levels up, in fact, to the level of the market-basket living allowance because, of course, ultimately that is a measure which looks at the actual cost of paying for your house, buying your groceries, getting from point A to point B, paying utility rates, all those kinds of things that we know are increasing at varying and increasing rates, particularly in Alberta.

My understanding is that if you were to look at the market-basket rate in, say, Edmonton, you'd find that to meet that level, you'd probably be looking at about \$2,000 a month. So as much as there's a lot of self-congratulation around the \$1,088, I think that the market-basket measure is one that has even been endorsed by the federal Conservative government through their own ministries. I would ask what kind of efforts have been made to measure what needs are actually being met as opposed to simply measuring what the increase is from what was previously a very, very low level.

In particular, I'd also ask if you could provide me with information about the number of AISH recipients who actually are accessing the rent supplement program right now. My understanding is that there is a portion of AISH recipients who actually are lucky enough to find housing where their rent is capped at 30 per cent. I'd like to know what percentage of the AISH recipients are in that position. Those two things together, of course, are of some value to us because, presumably, 30 per cent is a reasonable amount for someone to be paying for their rent. I'd like to know how much you know about where that's not what's going on with respect to our AISH recipients.

The next thing is just with respect to the employment incentive package. I'd be curious to know what the actual cost of that is where you've increased the amount of the exemption. I couldn't find a place to figure out exactly what that was. In particular, I'd like to know the exact numbers amongst those 36,000 recipients who

actually are receiving employment income right now and how many of those will be affected by the change in the exemption that you're putting out there.

Then my final question around that issue is simply whether there's been consideration within your ministry about – I mean, having my occasional quasi-lawyer hat on, looking at the fact that on one hand we've got a complete exemption of \$400 in addition to the \$1,088 that people can earn and hence receive, and then we have other disabled people who can only ever receive the \$1,088. That seems to me to be a recipe for discrimination on the basis of the severity of the disability. So I have some concerns about that, and I'm wondering what conversations, what studies or opinions you've received with respect to that disparity. I think those are all my questions with respect to the AISH funding.

I pressed my little button to time myself and automatically reset it, so I don't know exactly where I am right now. I apologize. I'll just go really quickly to the PDD funding, in particular as it relates to staffing. This is an area that is just in a phenomenal level of crisis right now, absolutely phenomenal. Of course, people always accuse those of us on this side of the House of lighting our hair on fire and being shocked and appalled almost all of the time. But in this area, really, if there was a bit of kerosene available, I might actually do it because it is such a serious area. [interjection] For myself, just myself. Don't worry.

I want to give you an anecdote of a parent who I spoke with when on the campaign trail, the mother of a 13-year-old autistic child. Now, I appreciate that that person is not actually funded through your ministry, but the staffing situation and the setting in which they found themselves is exactly similar to the areas that you fund through the PDD boards. Her 13-year-old son became too unmanageable for her to take care of at home. She is a nurse; he is a tradesman. We'd really like both of them to be working.

Ultimately, what happened was that they found a group home in which they could place their son for respite. Soon after both of them had happily returned to work, trying to get their lives back to normal, they received a phone call from the police. The police had been called because a neighbour had observed their son outside in the backyard of the group home for three hours with no mittens and no boots on when it was minus 25 degrees. That was because the staff inside the group home simply did not have the training or the capacity to manage the behaviour of a severely disabled child.

Frankly, that is the situation that you have with many adults with disabilities as well. You cannot – you cannot – pay people \$12 to \$16 an hour and expect them to have the skill and the education and the patience required to provide the kind of care that these people require in these settings. In my view you not only have a staff shortage, but you also have an incredible skills shortage in that sector. That comes from, you know, going through this whole nonprofit system where they're simply receiving roughly two-thirds of what people doing the same type of work in a more institutionalized, direct government-provided setting would get. My understanding is that it would take about \$180 million to bring the wages of people working in the PDD sector up to the level received by people that are direct employees of the government of Alberta. I would really like to ultimately see your budget reflect as a starting point that kind of increase to your staffing costs for PDD.

I have a final question. You talked about the \$30 million increase in that area. I understand that there was a one-time \$15 million addition in November to deal with compensation pressures. My question is: is that figure included in the \$30 million that we heard about on budget day?

Those are my questions for that sector. I'll stop there.

4:10

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you very much for those questions. The first area that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona addressed was AISH, and she mentioned the financial benefit. I would just like to reiterate that that financial benefit is not the only benefit that our AISH clients receive. They also receive health benefits as well as housing benefits.

You mentioned rent supplements and that sort of thing. Once again, I'd like to mention that we look at individuals too and support them in some of their special needs. Being one of the best financial benefits in the country and monitoring the benefits that they receive is something that we are doing in our department. AISH recipients that access the rent supplements. I will have to get back to you in written form on that one because I don't know the answer to that.

Then you mentioned the employment incentive, and you also asked what the cost of this increase would be. I will have to reply in writing again. The number of people who are receiving the employment exemption right now is about 18 per cent of the 36,000 that receive AISH. You asked: what about those who can't work? I would say to you that we do look at people as individuals. We do assess their needs, and we try to respond to the needs that they may bring forward to us.

You moved on to PDD and the staffing issue. First, I would like to say that I have to compliment the many PDD staff who are dedicated and committed to their work. I've talked to a number of them on the front line who are doing this work certainly not because of the wages, as you have pointed out, but because they are committed to the work that they are doing. Yes, we understand that there is a serious concern out there. I want to point out that for the 9,100 people who are receiving PDD supports, the budget is a total of \$571 million.

The position that we're in with labour – I don't want to belittle that either – is a labour workforce shortage that we're experiencing all through Alberta, and we need to find a way to improve the situation. I have talked to people on the front line about working with them on recruitment and retention and training, and there's a program that I'm reviewing right now to see if we can be more helpful in that area of training for our PDD staff. Once again, we're very supportive because the people in the PDD area are very important to us.

I want to talk about the wage increases that you did mention as well. In November of this year there was \$15 million that was dedicated to PDD staffing. That amount was annualized so that on top of the \$30 million is another \$15 million. There's a \$45 million item in the budget, so I would say that last year the PDD staff received a 5 per cent increase. In this budget, in the \$30 million they are receiving another 5 per cent increase, and we've already projected another 5 per cent increase for the following budget year. I do realize that we have to pay attention to this and work with them on this issue.

Those are the answers to those questions. The ones that I wasn't able to answer, we will provide the answer for you in writing.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much for those answers. I guess I would just simply add that at the end of the day with the gap in terms of the services that are provided by those staff and the training that they need to have, 5 per cent is not going to fix the problem. I mean, these staff should be getting wage increases in the area of 50, 60, 70 per cent. They are providing incredibly specialized care, and to get the training that that specialized care requires, you're looking at a good two years of education at minimum.

Just to move on from that, I'd like to talk briefly, not knowing exactly where I am in my time, about the issue of supportive living.

I want to start by echoing many of the concerns of the previous speakers with respect to the conversion of long-term care to supportive living, the lower levels of standards that exist in supportive living in terms of care. Those concerns have been pretty broadly canvassed.

What I'd like to just focus in on is that in the Auditor General's report he did note – and I think this is in this minister's area – that 14,000 spaces had been inspected as of January 2008 and that there were roughly another 10,000 to go. I'm just wondering where you are in that process in terms of getting that inspection completed. This may be something that people are aware of already, and I apologize, but I'm also curious as to how we can get access or what level of access is provided with respect to the outcome of those inspections.

The third question in that area is simply: what happens within the ministry if the inspections don't go well? I noted that in the Auditor's report there was a small percentage of facilities – well, not too small; a disturbingly significant number but still a smaller percentage, which I believe was around 15 per cent, maybe 10 per cent – that were noted to be noncompliant. They were inspected again, and they continued in noncompliance notwithstanding several different inspections. My question is: ultimately what happens to these facilities if they do not come into compliance? Are there any facilities who have been closed as opposed to simply having their licences made conditional? I know that there are some out there with conditional licences, but it seems that there are some that that doesn't help. Has the ministry ever closed any as a result of these inspections?

The final point that I just want to raise in case I run out of time is the issue of the education property tax. Of course, you had mentioned, I believe, that the ministry is now funding roughly \$11 million to help offset the costs of that. My estimates are that were the program in that respect restored to its pre-1994 levels, before the point at which this government asked seniors to start paying these taxes, that would actually be worth over a hundred million dollars to seniors in Alberta.

At the time that that decision was made, as you're probably aware, the current Premier got up and made the point that these sacrifices were being happily made by many seniors who wanted to be part of the process of reducing and eliminating this government's debt. Well, I heard somewhere from someone, not sure who, might have been one person over on that side, that the debt was eliminated some time ago. So I'm just curious as to what efforts are being made within your ministry to advocate for the implementation of that promise or sort of a promise that was made back in the Legislature. Just for your reference it was in the May 25, 1994, *Alberta Hansard*. I'm just curious as to whether we might be expecting any action or reviews or consultations around the issue of eliminating that property tax for seniors.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Well, thank you. I'm going to start with the last question first. I would like to make the comment that Alberta has one of the most comprehensive packages of seniors' benefits in the country. Our programs strike a good balance between assisting those most in need while providing some assistance to all seniors.

We have a number of programs that assist seniors with their living expenses, including the Alberta seniors' benefit program, the special-needs assistance for seniors program, the education property tax assistance for seniors program, and the dental and optical assistance program. The total of these budget items is \$406 million.

The Alberta seniors' benefit provides a monthly cash benefit to eligible low-income seniors, and that's on top of the education property tax benefit as well. Generally, a single senior with an income below \$22,200 and a senior couple with a combined income below \$35,900 will be eligible for this program. The maximum cash benefit is \$240 per month for single seniors and \$360 per month for senior couples.

4:20

Seniors who are eligible for the Alberta seniors' benefit and do not have the financial resources to fund one-time or extraordinary expenses may apply to the special-needs assistance for seniors program. This program assists low-income seniors with allowable special needs, such as medical expenses, appliances, and essential minor home repairs, up to \$5,000 each year.

The dental and optical assistance for seniors programs are also available to eligible seniors, and the income thresholds have been extended to include moderate-income seniors. Single seniors with an income of \$31,000 or less and senior couples with a combined income of \$62,000 or less are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 for basic dental services every five years and up to \$230 for prescription eyeglasses every three years.

The education property tax assistance for seniors program is available to all senior homeowners in Alberta regardless of income. Rebates are provided to senior homeowners to cover annual increases in the education portion of their property taxes.

All of these programs help to keep more money in the pockets of our seniors who are most in need.

I'll move on to the other questions that the member had. You talked about the supportive living program, and you noted that the AG mentioned that we had 14,000 spaces inspected as of January '08. By the end of this fiscal year we will have inspected 20,000 supportive living spaces and 14,000 in long-term care. That's our goal, and we intend to meet that. I want to note again that in three months we will have a website up for access to everyone so that they can look up supportive living facilities to see how they did in the inspection and where they're at.

The Chair: Thank you. Just a note that according to Standing Order 61(3) we have passed the first hour for the opposition members.

Now we will take turns, and I will recognize the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few comments I'd like to make to the minister. She touched lightly on the AISH program in her discussions, but I'd like a little further clarification on the initiatives that are occurring through the AISH program in the upcoming year. If the minister could expand on what AISH recipients will be getting, what are some of the programs in her budget that are being considered to expand benefits to AISH recipients. I'll get that response, and then I'll ask another question.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you for that question. In the Premier's mandate letter to me he asked that I "support persons with disabilities' independence and self-reliance by providing increased employability incentives." One of the ways we're doing this is to increase the amount of money a client can earn through employment.

Through current employment income exemptions – these are the current ones – single clients can earn up to \$400 of net monthly employment income before it affects their living allowance. Couples and single parents can earn up to \$975 each month before it affects their living allowance. A further 50 per cent of anything they earn above these amounts to a maximum of \$1,000 for singles

and \$2,000 for single parents and couples: those amounts won't affect their living allowance. With the upcoming increase, which was the question that you asked, these maximum exemptions will increase by \$500, to \$1,500 for singles and \$2,500 for couples. This means that AISH clients can earn more money each month while continuing to receive some level of financial and health benefits.

In addition to these exemptions, we're working with clients, employers, business leaders, and other government partners, such as Alberta Employment and Immigration, to develop new strategies that will allow AISH clients to participate in the workforce. These supports include providing AISH clients with job-seeking and job-training resources. Staff are also working with employment agencies and employers to develop appropriate job placement for AISH clients.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you for that answer. Just a little further expansion on that. You know, we hear from AISH recipients about other jurisdictions and how people in need are treated in other provinces. Do you have at your fingertips any comparisons from other jurisdictions across Canada on how we rate for people in need? I always hear these comments that we're the top, that we have the best benefits. But how does it compare? Are we 20 per cent higher, 20 per cent lower? Do you have any of those offhand?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for that question. I'd like to tell you a story about a friend of mine. Everybody else has had the opportunity to mention some anecdote, and I'd like to mention one, too. A family that my husband works with in the civil air search and rescue program, the parents were transferred to Winnipeg. They did a search of the benefits that would be available to their disabled son in Winnipeg, and they did a search here in Alberta. They decided that the best place for him to be was here in Alberta, so they made the sacrifice of leaving their son here in Alberta, where they felt that he would receive better benefits, not only financial but health benefits. That's a personal story that I can tell you, that we do have better benefits here in Alberta.

I did state this once before, but I will repeat it because I think it's worth repeating. These are the financial benefits that are provided in other provinces. We are the best as far as financial benefits go and, I believe from my personal experience, in medical benefits as well. In Newfoundland and Labrador the financial benefit is \$657; P.E.I., \$759; Nova Scotia, \$739; New Brunswick, \$600; Quebec, \$962; Ontario, \$999; Manitoba, \$756; Saskatchewan, \$816; and B.C., \$906; in comparison to our \$1,088 per month.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for those answers. I was studying the documents from our budget this year, and I note that your department had quite an increase in percentage over most other departments. I want you to tell me in comparison to last year's budget – first, how much was last year's budget? How much is this year's budget? How much is that increase that you're getting? How much is that increase compared to most other departments?

Mrs. Jablonski: In answer to the member's question, our budget last year was \$1,760,737,000. This year our estimate is \$1,914,150,000. In general, overall that's an 8.7 per cent increase. We have increases in all of our departments. If individuals don't see an increase, it's

because we have more uptake in those departments, so we have to provide supports for more people. But each department did receive an increase.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you. Again to the minister. It would seem that the opposition comments on the seniors' cost of living and the expectations that our seniors budget is not keeping up to the pace of inflation – would it be wrong to assume that those comments that have been made are inaccurate? You've just said that you have an 8.8 per cent increase, so it sounds like you're well above the inflation rate.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. There has been an increase in our seniors budget, and I would note once again that if seniors don't notice a personal, individual increase, the increase goes towards the uptake of more seniors. We're going to face this every year. We're going to have more seniors who require support. Alberta seniors are eligible for what we consider to be – and I'm sure that we could prove it to you – one of the most comprehensive packages of seniors' benefits in the country. We focus on providing assistance to low-income seniors who are most in need. Through today's combination of universal and targeted benefits every Alberta senior receives some level of assistance.

4:30

Across all our ministries the government provides more than \$2.3 billion a year to seniors through income supplements and assistance with expenses for prescription drugs, long-term care, housing, dental work, and eyeglasses. All seniors regardless of income receive premium-free Alberta Blue Cross coverage and do not pay health care premiums. All seniors regardless of income receive rebates on increases to the education portion of their property tax, and the programs provide the highest monthly provincial payment in Canada with the most generous income threshold to supplement federal benefits, among the highest minimum monthly disposable incomes of any province for low-income seniors in long-term care, and help for low-income seniors with unexpected or one-time costs like essential minor home repairs.

Mr. VanderBurg: My final question to the minister. At the end of this year there will be no requirement for Albertans to pay the health care premium, and in your department you have hundreds of staff that you're paying the benefit for. What will be the savings to your department for health care premiums, and what will you do with that extra savings? Will you put that into seniors' programs or will you put that into staff benefits?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you for that question. You're way ahead of us on that. We don't know the exact amount of savings that we will have. We can provide that for you in writing. However, I would suggest to you that any savings that we do have from that benefit will go back into all of our programs and be disbursed throughout the programs as needed.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you.

The Chair: Right now I would like to recognize the hon. Member

for Lethbridge-East. She indicated she wanted 20 minutes with the minister.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a couple of sort of wrap-up things. My hon. colleague across from me – I'm sorry; I can't remember where he's from – actually asked the question that I was going to ask. Not only will there be savings from the staffing, but there will be some, not a lot but some, actually within the program benefits. As to where that money could go, of course, I would like to see it go to keep the staffing levels up for PDD and those.

One of the things that was brought up. Actually it was also brought up by my colleague from Lethbridge-West in a member's statement that he made. He was speaking about seniors' centres. It was, I think, alluded to probably 20 minutes ago. But in my mind, in my vision for senior centres I think that they are very, very, very important, and I would like the department to take a look at it in terms of probably my vision, for lack of better words.

We have three seniors' centres in southern Alberta. We have two of the largest in Lethbridge, and I really believe that if we could extend these seniors' centres and fund them correctly out of the seniors' ministry – certainly their major problem at this point in time is operating costs because their utilities are so out of control. It's hard to actually be able to define because some of them are funded by municipalities and some are not.

There are various ways in which our seniors' centres are funded; however, they really do cover some of the things that are most important that will keep our seniors young and active and actually prevent having to go into the health care system. I guess I could use the example of our 94-year-old guest today. Because he writes all the time, he's kept busy. How lucky for him that he actually can do that.

Socialization is a huge, huge issue. It is performed and gives much benefit to people who go to the seniors' centres. Even if they just go to eat, they talk to other people. They play cards. There's also often many things that they can learn there. There are radios, there are computers, woodworking. There are a number of things that can challenge people, certainly the programs that they offer in terms of physical activities: tai chi, yoga, and just plain exercises. Sometimes they actually have badminton and those sorts of things, depending of course on the age and the abilities.

The other thing, I think, that's really important to have in a seniors' centre and have it funded correctly is that at this point in time – and I can only speak for Lethbridge – we do have a young lady who covers the government programs. It's really quite intimidating for a senior to sit down and try to figure out the programs. There are two ministries and 19 different departments between the two, so it's quite a maze. I really believe that there should be somebody on full-time staff because the girl that does it now goes between the two, and she's just overwhelmed, absolutely overwhelmed.

The other thing that I think should be on there or available to our seniors in a good seniors' centre is a nurse practitioner, and she should be on six hours a day. More often than not, rather than have to go to a doctor, our seniors could go to their local nurse practitioner that works in their building and that they totally trust. Sometimes it's just something that they need. Particularly if they have heart problems, all they want to do is have their blood pressure checked or just somebody to sometimes pay attention to them. That, again, would keep them out of the health care system.

The other important thing that would come out of that would be transportation and outreach. We have a number of particularly women, older women, who often don't get out of their little, tiny apartments or out of their homes. Often it's just because someone

hasn't made that outreach to them. I really believe that our seniors' centres in this province could be leaders within the country in terms of how we keep seniors out of the health care system and how we actually keep them active and healthy, healthy being the main component of that. So I certainly would like the department to consider those sorts of things and how seniors would have one place to go and feel comfortable.

My second question would be – and I don't believe that it was answered when it was asked before – about the noncompliance of facilities. If a facility is noncompliant, how many times do they get a crack at it? Are there some out there that you're still monitoring? Then, what would your plan be? If they're noncompliant and you want to be able to shut them down or control them, what is the plan? Do you actually bring in an administration team? I guess we all know that you can't close them down – where on earth would those residents go? – so there would have to be a plan A, B, C, D, E, and F to be able to move people if you actually shut it down. Obviously, I think that it would have to be the administration. I'd like the answer to how many are actually in that sort of stage of noncompliance and how many times they have actually been given a chance.

On page 326, line 3.1.5 – I'm sorry, I think it comes out of the ministry business plans – it shows that though the amount budgeted for the brain injury initiative was \$14 million, et cetera, in 2007 and 2008, the forecast amount fell drastically short of this at \$9,637,000. Why was the funding in this area underspent, and why is a larger amount being allotted to it this time around? What supports are included under the Other Supports for Persons with Disability category, and how would this money be distributed? What is the criteria that you're actually using?

Brain injury, in my mind, would happen often through motor vehicle accidents, so these are young people. Again, we don't want to see them put into long-term care facilities where, truly, it's inappropriate for them to be placed because of the other people that are there. They want to be able to turn on Elvis when sometimes the other people just want to hear Vera Lynn sing, you know, *The White Cliffs of Dover* or *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* or something. I'm wondering if some of that funding is being taken with that in mind: that we have to fairly be able to put people together so that they actually have the same socialization level.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, I do agree with the member opposite that our seniors' centres are very important facilities to have in place for all our seniors. I thought that you had quite an original idea with the nurse practitioner idea. I would like to also point out that we've had people think about parish nursing as well to accomplish the same things; that is, to reach our seniors and have a place for them to go where they can discuss their issues without feeling rushed, as you might be in a doctor's office. I like those ideas, and I just want to say that they're very creative and unique.

The transportation and outreach that you mentioned for some elderly senior women that may not be going out: I want to just comment on that. I think it is important that they have contact and that we find a way. I want to compliment the Meals on Wheels programs that we have throughout Alberta, that we also support through this ministry. I just want to say that it's an incredible program because it doesn't just provide a meal and nourishment for our seniors, but it does provide that outreach that you talk about.

When I was talking with our Meals on Wheels program in Red Deer, I was told that not only were they glad to get that meal in their hands; they wanted to hold people up for a few minutes so that they

could discuss a few things. If you were to send another volunteer, not the usual volunteer, they want to know where their usual volunteer is.

It's a great program. It's part of a group of programs that I call seniors helping seniors, and I think it's a wonderful way for people who are retired to give back to their communities in some way. We have wonderful, dedicated, and committed seniors doing that. I just want to compliment them on that, recognizing that we need outreach programs for our seniors and that we need our seniors' facilities.

I just want to tell you that it really is important to us that our seniors' centres are doing okay in that about 75 per cent of our seniors' centres have said that they're on solid financial footing. That's according to a survey and a consultation that we had with the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and the Alberta Council on Aging. Just to go further into that, I would tell you that there are provincial grants for our seniors' centres, which are important, and we provide financial support through the Family and Community Support Services and our municipal sustainability initiative.

I'm going to go into some of the lottery funds that are available for our seniors' centres as well. There's the CFEP program, or the community facility enhancement program, that provides matching grants to municipalities. There's the major community facilities program, which provides additional funding on top of the CFEP grant for major community facilities, and that would include our seniors' centres. We have the CIP program, the community initiatives program, that provides grants to support the enrichment and enhancement of project-based initiatives in areas such as community services, seniors' services. That also includes our libraries and our arts and culture areas. We have the Wild Rose Foundation quarterly grants program. This also supports the volunteer sector by providing skill development and training opportunities and other grants as well. We have the Historical Resources Foundation, which provides partial sponsorship for local heritage initiatives, including historical building restoration, research and publications, educational projects, historical markers, and area conservation. I know that seniors are very interested in all of those areas.

There are also federal grants available. One in particular is the new horizons for seniors program through the government of Canada, which provides three types of funding to nonprofit organizations, which is capital assistance funding, so supports for upgrading community facilities and equipment related to existing programs and activities for seniors; the elder abuse awareness funding, which provides supports for projects that raise awareness of elder abuse; and the community participation and leadership funding, which encourages seniors to contribute to their communities by sharing their skills, wisdom, and experience and helps to reduce isolation.

There are other grants that are available for our seniors' centres, including the United Way, which provides funding to nonprofit organizations to support programs which promote health or provide a social service.

So there are many areas of funding for our seniors' centres, which – I agree with you – are essential to the health and wellness of our seniors.

You did ask another question on continuing care. I'd like to address that by telling you that we have the community access for people in continuing care initiative. This new initiative was developed in response to recommendation 14 of the 2005 MLA Task Force on Continuing Care Health Service and Accommodation Standards, which recommended providing individualized supports to assist people currently in continuing care who are socially and culturally isolated, especially younger people, to be more involved in community activities. These supports will be available to

individuals under 65 years of age who are living in continuing care facilities and because of their disability are culturally or socially isolated.

Funding will be used by community support co-ordinators who will work with individuals, facilities, and communities to determine ways to provide people with disabilities with meaningful opportunities to be involved in chosen activities. In partnership with the health regions, regional teams will identify people and the supports needed to help them participate in community activities, recreation, and/or educational programs which will enhance their quality of life.

This initiative will also examine the needs of people with disabilities currently at risk of admission to continuing care facilities and will work to expand the range of housing options available.

This initiative will serve approximately 500 individuals, and in our '08-09 funding \$5 million has been provided for this initiative. That will respond to your question on the brain injury initiative line, that you were concerned about.

Thank you for those questions.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Actually, the other question was about compliance, the groups that were compliant. But I'll keep going, and then you can answer that.

I really love the line "seniors helping seniors," because that is what's happening. Meals on Wheels, I couldn't agree more, is a wonderful program. However, like everything else in this province, we're running out of staff, so to speak. I'm not sure how we recruit or how we do these things, but we really do need a few more people under the age of 80 that are delivering some of these meals because these are the people that are driving the cars. It does get to be a bit of a sticky wicket in terms of how we can keep the programs going, and it's absolutely essential that they are kept going.

You spoke about the 2005 task force and recommendation 14. I guess I pat myself on the back, but I was very proud of the work that we did on that task force. I think it was very comprehensive. Both colleagues across the way were on that task force with me. I think there was some very good work done, and I'm quite pleased with some of the movement that I see going forward.

You spoke about all of the programs that are available for seniors, but basically what you were talking about was money for programs. What I was talking about was the actual operating costs. The money that comes through from FCSS, really, is programming. Programming is great, but if you don't have a building, you know, to give the programs, then it's a backward circle sort of thing. I think that operating funds have to be looked at in some fashion. Some seniors' centres are not having a problem, but they also don't offer a lot. You know, it's really apples and oranges. It's very difficult to compare some to the others because some are so very different. Some in smaller centres don't need as much because there's an interrelationship between small communities that is totally different than, say, a downtown community centre in Calgary or Edmonton.

One of the other things that I'd like the ministry to look at is to help keep our seniors in their homes. Taxes have gone up because of the market value assessment, and utilities, of course, are a huge issue for them. Another issue, too, for them to be able to stay in their homes is the fact that some of these homes are 40 and 45 years old. That's how long they've been in these homes. It could need a new roof. It could need a new furnace. It could need just a few of these things that would help these people, but no way can they afford to do that. Why could we not loan money basically to the house? Then the roof could be fixed. The furnace could be fixed. The windows could be fixed. They could be putting in high efficiency

that would then help not only the environment but certainly their utility bills. When the house is sold, the loan would be paid back. In a way the loan is to the house and not necessarily to the people. I think that idea is worth looking into. I believe we've talked about it before. It certainly isn't the first time, but I'd like to bring it up again.

4:50

The other thing I'd like to talk about – and it was touched on – is dental services. Now, it was talked about in terms of dentures. In this day and age when there are so many other treatments that are available to people for their teeth – for instance, certainly crowns, certainly implants – this dental program only covers your own teeth or dentures. Many, many people are coming into the system – and, certainly, the baby boomers will be among those – that have crowns, that have implants, and the plan doesn't cover that. So now we've got people either having to do without or actually just not replacing crowns. Good health for seniors, as with everyone, is good oral hygiene so that they actually can chew properly and have good nutrition.

The other thing is the optical. This is such an individual sort of thing. I'm just wondering if there's been any research in terms of the stats for what the average is for people over the age of 65 for when their eyes change. Some people can change drastically within a year probably a couple of times, and others may have 20/20 until they're, you know, 80 or whatever. I'd like to know if there are any stats on that. How do we individualize eye care?

The Chair: Our 20 minutes have gone by, so now I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary Nose-Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A question that I have for the minister is regarding the Protection for Persons in Care Act. I'm wondering whether or not the minister has any plans to revise or overhaul the Protection for Persons in Care Act, in particular with respect to expansion of the areas of coverage of that act outside of hospitals and nursing homes and so on, and, secondly, to ask whether or not there has been any contemplation of changing the act so as to require co-operation with investigations under the Protection for Persons in Care Act, which is strictly a voluntary initiative right now, and also whether or not there's any contemplation of bringing in legislation to provide for mandatory production of necessary documents in such investigations, things like prescriptions, drug use, drug history, and so on.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you very much for that question. I am just going through the Protection for Persons in Care Act, and I am aware of most of the points that you have made with that. We will monitor how things are going and see what the needs are for the future with that act. I understand the points that you're making about that.

At this time I'd like to talk about the compliance issue that has been raised twice and isn't exactly PPC, but it would come close. I just wanted to say that we work with our facilities. They're inspected, and if they're not meeting the accommodation standards, they're given written notice. They're given a timeline. We reinspect those facilities. We work with them. As long as we see progress, we continue to monitor to ensure that they're at least living up to our request to improve their standards. I would tell you that in the end if they are not improving their standards, if they don't live up to those standards, we have the ability to shut them down. The member opposite made the point about shutting down a facility and what that would mean for the people who are in that facility. Of

course, we would work with the communities to ensure that anybody in that facility is properly taken care of.

I believe that compliance is very important, and that goes kind of hand in hand with the Protection for Persons in Care Act, something that I'm also monitoring and taking your comments seriously as I go forward in this ministry.

Ms Woo-Paw: Hon. minister, I guess all of us are aware that Alberta's demographic is changing, so our seniors population is also changing and will continue to change. One of the changes is, of course, the cultural/linguistic diversity within our seniors population. Also, as some of our cultural communities become more and more mature, I think there is more ability and interest in trying to play a role to respond to some of those changing needs. The Chinese community in Calgary have established a partnership program with Meals on Wheels – they call it Chopsticks on Wheels – and, of course, the government working in partnership with the community and the federal government opened the Wing Kei nursing home in 2005. So I think that wonderful things are happening. Also, today I had the opportunity to learn a lot more about the great things that are happening with our government's support to seniors and knowing that we are on firm ground to be even better, to be the best in the country.

I guess my question is: while I recognize that it takes time for institutions and organizations to put in place the necessary changes to respond to that changing demographic and the changing needs and also recognizing the opportunity that many of the cultural communities now have increased capacity and interest to work with other stakeholders to address the issues, are there opportunities from your perspective, hon. minister?

We have a human resource crunch in the human service sector; however, it could also be an opportunity to make changes. This is the time that we're looking at setting standards and competencies for the various sectors. Do you see that there would be opportunity within this ministry to turn some of this crisis into opportunity so that we have a more reflective workforce in the sector that could service a changing population better and also, instead of having communities come up with different kinds of culturally based senior centres, to actually have a more comprehensive plan so that we can have a more integrated approach to serving seniors in Alberta, so that we have actual centres that will have a greater cultural mix rather than segregated cultural groups?

I'm wondering whether, you know, these might be ideas that could be incorporated into the work of the ministry. To me, it doesn't really require additional sources of money. It's a matter, I think, of changing the way we set our priorities and standards and expectations on cultural competency in serving a diverse population.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The member raises some very good issues and some very vibrant cultural issues as well. I know that in some of the centres that I visited, when we have diversity within the centres and they have the different days for the different ethnicities, we experience different foods and different entertainment in our seniors' centres, and it provides such an exciting and vibrant community for all seniors. I think those are excellent ideas, and I would not like to see anything segregated because I don't think you win anything through any kind of segregation. So let's keep our seniors' centres open to seniors of all cultures and races, and let's celebrate the diversity they bring to our centres.

You mentioned something that's really important, and that's the way that our demographics are changing and what we're doing about

that. We know that they're changing and they're changing rapidly, and we have to have a plan in place that includes all seniors no matter who they are or where they're from. If they're in Alberta, they're our seniors, and we need to make sure that we look after them.

5:00

We know that the number of seniors is going to rise by 40 per cent in the next 10 years. We have commissioned a demographic planning commission that's to be appointed this spring to assist this government in determining the best ways to meet the needs of all our seniors. That is being put in place. I must tell you that we have a very distinguished list of people who have applied for that commission, and I'm looking forward to what they will bring to us.

The findings of this commission will support the development of an aging population policy framework, which will help decision-makers consider the needs of our future seniors and the roles of governments, communities, families, and individuals in meeting these needs. I must say to you all that not only is it the responsibility of our government to be involved in the planning for the future of all seniors, but I think that it's also part of communities and families to be involved as well. So to strike up a partnership between this provincial government, our municipal communities, and our families is very important for the future of seniors and for the future of everyone in Alberta.

The Chair: Well, thank you.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I guess I'm holding it up for the opposition, right?

One other thing that hasn't been discussed in terms of integration in terms of our seniors' long-term care, or anywhere that care is required, is that what is going to be very important is language skills. As people get older and if they have any signs of dementia, often they will go back to their first language. Even when I was in the business, you know, almost 20 years ago, it was a huge issue because there were many people that came over, and the women often did not learn to speak English as well as they could've because they were busy raising families. Regardless of whether they are proficient in English, often they'll slip back into their mother tongue, so I think that's going to be important.

I guess I would ask the minister to hopefully still have the questions that I'd asked the last time, and maybe you could answer those. Unfortunately, I'm not sure I have written them down. You have them, though?

One other question that I could ask is: in facilities that are private, for-profit, in facilities that are supported by the public dollar, and then in nonprofit facilities that sometimes are a little bit of both, again we've got this division of: housing usually makes the money and the care is what costs the money. Exactly how is your department or your ministry able to enforce standards that would go across from public to private, for-profit?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Going back to your last question first, I understand that accommodation standards do apply to the private supportive living facilities and that they are inspected. They're part of the numbers that I gave you a few minutes ago.

As far as your previous questions are concerned, I have to tell you that I shuffled my papers and I can't find them. But I have made the commitment that any question you asked, if I haven't answered it, you will receive the response in writing.

I'd like to note the comment that you made about the importance of language skills, especially for seniors with dementia who may revert to their mother tongue. I agree with you. That's a very important point to note, and we will note that for the future.

Those are the comments that I would like to make. I did talk about the compliance and the inspections. I think that it's very important to note that we can take action and we will take action if people do not comply with the standards, because that's so important for our seniors.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'm glad to see that I'm not the only one that shuffles papers and then can't find them. I totally understand.

One more question if I might. One of the things that's happened with, well, seniors and partly with PDD people as well: service providers have been eliminating day programs that allow people with disabilities the opportunity to volunteer or actually participate in the community. Insufficient funding has resulted in the severe shortage of staff and the inability to recruit and retain qualified workers. Is this in the minister's plan as outlined in the business plan? It isn't just staff shortages in terms of their physical care; it actually is staff shortages in terms of the socialization out into the community. So I'm wondering if that's being addressed and how you have addressed that. I'm sorry; I think it's on the seniors' business plan, page 231, core business goal 5, that you want to increase the access to supports.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you again for those questions. I just wanted to go into the PDD budget once again. Hopefully, I'll cover some of the questions that you have asked. The budget for 2008-09 totals \$570.9 million and includes the services to assist adults with developmental disabilities. So this is how the budget breaks down: the ones that live in their homes, \$324 million – for example, \$273 million in the community and \$48 million in PDD community board operated facilities; the services that assist adults who participate in activities in their communities, \$84 million – that's in that budget; the services to help them prepare for or retain a job, \$25 million goes to that, and that supports a mandate from the Premier; and to access other special services for individuals such as psychological and behavioural services, we have a breakdown of \$7 million. So there are funds within that almost \$571 million to support the PDD in our programs.

I would say to you that these programs are very important and that it is important that we help support that. I'd also like to say that I'm glad to see that some families participate in helping their family members who are provided for in the PDD program experience the community by taking them out to special events.

I know you didn't ask this question, but the other thing that's important as far as providing day programs for people with PDD: I think that in the future we're going to have to also look at – and I'm taking this into consideration for the future – senior care programs, which, once again, make our seniors' centres very important and the work they do with our seniors very valuable.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Just one last question, probably. At one point it was 9,200 adult Albertans that were actually benefiting from the PDD program. Could you tell me: have those numbers gone up or down? It's still 9,200, and it's an awful lot of money when we look at the number of people that we're helping. I guess my question would be: how much of that is administration?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would say to you that I totally agree with you that the \$571 million that we spend in the PDD program is a sizable amount of money. For your information, in our budget targets we have a breakdown of the money that goes to our six community boards. The Calgary community board receives approximately \$135 million; the central community board receives approximately \$129 million; the Edmonton community board, \$151 million; the northeast board, \$27 million; the northwest community board – these are approximates – 19 and a half million dollars; the south community board, \$56 million; and our program supports is about \$7 million.

And you wanted the numbers of the clients as well in those programs.

5:10

Ms Pastoor: Not necessarily in separate programs, just the overall total.

Mrs. Jablonski: It is 9,100. You don't want to know for our community boards how many they're supporting? The Calgary board supports 2,500 people with PDD; central community board, 1,800; Edmonton community board, 2,800; northeast, 550; northwest, 350; and south community board, 1,100.

I would like to point out to you, too, in case you're having a look at the numbers of people that are supported in the six different community boards, that you may see that the numbers don't compute. What I would say to you is that it's very different for each client, that we meet the individual needs of our PDD clients. So one person who has extreme needs may be receiving three or four times the amount of support that one with basic needs would have. That's why you can't calculate it by dividing people and saying that central gets more than Calgary, or whatever it might be, because each individual person is supported individually and not with averaged numbers.

You wanted to know about administrative costs. Thanks to my good team support that I have here with me. We use about \$38 million for administration. That's about 6.8 per cent. That includes policy support and administrative and governance costs for the community boards as well. So 6.8 per cent for administrative costs. I think that you'll agree with me that that's pretty fair.

The Chair: I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. I guess we'll start another 20 minutes, although I don't know that we'll take it all because there may be others. But let's start the back and forth.

I'm pleased I got another opportunity to rise. The minister was not able to complete her answers to the questions I had put earlier, which were specific to mental health supports, dentures, was there any legislation coming, and who the we was when we talked about unsupervised visits.

A couple more questions that I will add to that. One is around the issue that I have raised repeatedly around having the cost of telephones – residential telephones, single lines, nothing fancy – included in the subsidized rate that seniors pay for their housing. Now, again, the minister is immediately going to say that's not her department; it's Housing and Urban Affairs. But this is part of my frustration, that lack of co-ordination on these cross-ministry issues. Has any work been done, or have any studies been done? Is there any pot of money that could be pulled from to look at either

including the cost of a single-line telephone rental inside of that 30 per cent that seniors pay as a subsidized rate or some other kind of initiative that would assist low-income seniors or seniors living in subsidized residences to be able to cover the cost of the phone?

My argument is that the telephone for these people is not an entertainment device; it is a lifeline. For those that still use those MedicAlerts – help me; I fell down; can somebody come and get me up? – they work through a telephone line. So if you can't afford to have a telephone line as a senior, you can't have one of those medical devices. Secondly, for a number of seniors a telephone is necessary to be able to order prescriptions and have them delivered. There are even grocery services. I think there's a significant mental health component to being able to communicate with family and with others outside of your home for friendship, and this is an issue that has been raised consistently with me over the last 12 years.

The private member's statement that I made earlier today, in which I was essentially reading a letter to me from a group of seniors living in one of the seniors' residences in my riding, at the end, you know, once again came back to this: with the competition between telephone companies today, they're wondering if the government went to them, could they not negotiate some kind of a package that would make these single-line telephones very affordable? Why isn't this something that the government could be doing on behalf of its elderly citizens, helping them negotiate such a package? The easiest thing, as I said, and the first thing that we recommended many years ago was to include the cost of the telephone inside of the 30 per cent that they're paying. At this point that would accomplish what those seniors have been asking for overall, which is a reduction from 30 per cent to 25 per cent of their income being used to pay for their accommodation.

My final questions. On page 326 of the estimates, the general revenue fund and lottery fund document, the program that I was trying to remember before when I was talking about dentures is the special-needs program, so I wasn't that far off. I notice that we now have it broken out, which may well be why you can't get dental coverage under the special-needs program. Now it's the seniors' dental assistance program. The complaints I've had in my office are that, you know, it's too restrictive and it's not covering what they really need, which is often the replacement of dentures. I think the dental assistance is actually about teeth cleaning procedures and fairly straightforward procedures, again, not covering the dentures specifically.

I'm looking at votes 2.2.5 and 2.2.6, and there are increases in both of these. I'm wondering how many procedures are expected to be added. You've increased the money quite a bit, from \$52 million in the forecast for '07-08 – \$54 million was the actual in '06 – to \$59.9 million. That's a significant amount of money. How many more procedures does the ministry expect will be done, or how many more visits will be done under the seniors' dental assistance program? How many more individuals? I don't know how you qualify this, but how many more are you expecting to happen, whether it's visits, procedures, or seniors that are assisted? As well, I'm noticing an increase in the seniors' optical assistance program from \$5.5 million to \$7.1 million. Again, how many more individuals are we expecting will be helped? Is this a volume increase? As well, are there any changes in the eligibility levels for entry criteria into these programs? Is it just more people getting the same thing or is it more people getting a different, enhanced program or is it a completely enhanced program where the same number of people are getting additional benefits or access?

Thank you for that opportunity to put those additional questions on the record. I think we've still got some time to hear the answers.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you very much for that. I'm going to start with the mental health supports. Clients who have mental health concerns can access the AISH program.

I just want to point out, again, another anecdote of a facility in the central Alberta region that I visited. It is a facility for people with mental health issues. The facility was specifically purchased for people with schizophrenia to access. Speaking on the mental health issue, there's a partnership in that facility between the David Thompson health region and the Schizophrenia Society and the Canadian Mental Health Association. What they do is provide affordable housing for I believe 40 units. They're beautiful, brand new units. They're not just living units; they have programs for people with mental health issues.

This is a community coming together to give supports to 40 people in order to train them in some things that we take for granted. For example, in this program not only do they give them a place to live, but they give them supports like teaching them how to make their own meals, how to catch a bus. They do some skills training as well. The counselling, you understand, of course, for mental health is under health care. I think that the supports that we're seeing in our communities are very good for some of our mental health people, but we do have areas for improvement. Once again, they can access the AISH program.

5:20

In speaking about the dental program, I'm going to go to the question that you asked: who's getting the increases? I would say to that that more people are accessing the program. Approximately 12,000 seniors access the dental assistance for seniors program each month. Approximately 29,000 seniors received assistance from the optical assistance for seniors program in '07-08. The dental assistance for seniors program contributed \$815,000 to the Alberta Dental Association and College toward a pilot project for two mobile dental units. These units will serve seniors that have difficulty visiting their dentist; for example, seniors living in long-term care facilities or remote locations. This was originally scheduled for the fall of 2006, and the delivery of the units has been delayed to 2008.

I want to also mention something notable with the scope of practice changes that we brought to dental assistants. Instead of having to practise in a dentist's office only, we also have dental assistants who now go to our supportive living and long-term care facilities to help our seniors with their dental care. So I think that's a great improvement.

You wanted to know why things like – I think you mentioned this – crowns are not covered. What I would say to you is that the dental program for seniors provides coverage for basic dental services that help maintain a reasonable level of dental health. In consultation with the Alberta Dental Association and College it was determined that a number of procedures, such as crowns and bridges, are not considered a basic dental service and that most dental plans that provide coverage for basic service do not include these procedures.

You spoke about dentures and the fact that people's mouths can change so that the fit of the denture isn't very good and the service which is provided once every three or five years, I think you mentioned, is probably not adequate, and what are we doing about that. I would like to take what you've said under consideration. I'm just becoming familiar with all these programs myself. I would venture to say that if somebody has a very serious need about the changes that have been happening to their mouth and their dentures, those are the kinds of issues that we would look at on an individual basis.

The other questions that you had?

Ms Blakeman: Legislation.

Mrs. Jablonski: Legislation regarding?

Ms Blakeman: Any legislation.

Mrs. Jablonski: Any legislation coming up. Well, as you know, last year we had the Personal Directives Act. We know that that's excellent legislation that provides protection for people who have lost the ability to make decisions for themselves. The other place that that's essential legislation is if you were in a coma and you lost the ability to make decisions for yourself. When you get back out of that coma, how do you take over the authority of your life again? I think that that's well laid out in the protection of our Personal Directives Act.

Also, we have the guardianship and trustee act coming forward as well. I believe that the minimum that we will do with that act is have it read into the House prior to the summer. I think it's very important to make that available for our standing committees over the summer and also available for the medical community and the legal community. So that will come forward prior to the House closing.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I just want to go back to the crowns. When they say that they don't consider it basic care, I would certainly differ with that opinion because prior to being 65 the dentists that are going to sell you the crowns and the implants and all the other magic stuff that they want to sell you will say that it's basic care. My point is that if you have it, if you have the crowns and the implants and the bridges and the whatever else going into the system, then I don't consider it basic. I'm just talking about having it repaired and being looked at. So a crown falls out. You shouldn't have to pay extra. That should be considered basic care. I can understand that if they want to do it afterwards, say, after 65 or whatever, if you want to have it then, okay, maybe that would be up for discussion. But if you're coming into the system with a crown that falls out, I really believe that that's basic care.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the hon. member across the way for her comments on having the crowns prior to going into the seniors' programs. I will take that under consideration. Thank you very much for that comment.

The Chair: I have to consider the time here. We have reached the two and a half hour time limit. It is now required that the Committee of Supply rise and report prior to the time of adjournment. Now I would like to invite the officials to leave the Assembly so the committee may rise and report progress.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions for the Department of Seniors and Community Supports relating to the 2008-09 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009, reports progress, and requests leave to sit again.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the report, does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

I would like to recognize the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 7:30 p.m., when we'll reconvene in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

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