

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, March 7, 2006

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/03/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

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.

head:

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a proud Albertan. He's been a proud Albertan since 1988. He did not arrive here for the Olympics, but if riding motorcycles and scuba diving were Olympic sports, he'd be right in there. I'm speaking, of course, of Dave Ryzebol. He is the VP of public affairs and government relations for Canada Safeway, a fine corporate citizen; one of the board of directors of the Canada Safeway Foundation; a huge fundraiser for tsunami relief, over a million dollars there, for Boys and Girls clubs, and for food banks, the biggest in western Canada; also, as I mentioned in last week's member's statement, a Mountain of Heroes foundation sponsor. His wife, Dorothy, his son Christopher, who's working here in high tech in Edmonton at Bioware, are very, very proud of him. I know he's proud to live in Calgary-West, and I know that Calgary-West is so well represented. I would like all members to join me in the traditional welcome for Dave Ryzebol. He's in the members' gallery. Please stand and be recognized, Dave.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly a visiting grade 6 class from Fulton Place elementary school. There are 16 visitors this afternoon, 14 students. They are accompanied by teachers Dr. Wade Pike and Miss Quinn Sloan. This group is visiting the Assembly today, and they are in the members' gallery. If they could now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly, I would appreciate it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and members of the Assembly some 28 bright and eager students from the Edmonton Christian school in the northeast part of the city. There are 28 students. With them is their teacher Mr. Greg Gurnett. I might point out that he's the brother of a former MLA from this Legislative Assembly and a colleague of mine. The parents here with them are Mrs. Carol Boonstra, Mrs. Donna Nyland, and Mrs. Annette Visser. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Tina Faiz. Tina has joined the NDP caucus staff as our communications director and as executive assistant to the leader. She has worked in several federal government departments and earned a woman of distinction award in 2003. Since then, Tina has run a very successful communications company with her partner and has been a freelance contributor to CBC radio and television. We're delighted to have her with us, and I would now ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Ms Calahasen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature a very young, great Alberta leader, Trevor Gladue. He holds many positions. First of all, as a VP of the Métis Nation of Alberta provincial council, Trevor was first elected in 1996 and is serving his second term. Of course, the next one that he does is as chair of Northern Lakes College. He's seated in the members' gallery. He resides in the minister of health's riding. Lucky woman. I'd ask that he stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all colleagues here in the Legislature a good friend of mine and a former mayor of the town of Whitecourt. Brady Whittaker, would you please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Aon Consulting Inc.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier admitted that he's getting his information on electricity deregulation from Enmax commercials. We also know that he's getting his information on private health insurance from Aon, a consulting arm of a private insurance company. No wonder this government will only conduct a superficial consultation process on their health care proposal when they clearly value the advice of insurance companies before the opinion of ordinary Albertans. My questions are to the Premier. Given that this government has paid Aon 1 and a half million dollars in taxpayer money to tell the government how to implement private insurance, will the Premier release the results of that study immediately so that its findings can be part of the consultation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I find the Leader of the Official Opposition's assertions to be somewhat confounding in that Aon has not yet submitted its report.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that a comprehensive study by the World Health Organization has said

that supplementary private insurance actually increases inequalities in service and access, why is this government paying Aon for advice when we already know what the outcomes of this policy will be?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, we don't know. Certainly, I'm sure the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness will take into account the findings of the world health association as we assess the overall public consultation phase of this exercise.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that Aon is designing the private health insurance system, will Aon be allowed to then participate in the very market that it's designing?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I can't really comment on what Aon is doing or not doing because they haven't submitted their report yet.

Relative to their ongoing involvement I'll have the hon. minister respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have not seen the report yet. The report is actually building actuarial models and studies to look at the impact. It has nothing to do with the current consultations on public health. It has everything to do with finding out if we were to change – if we were to change – any of the mix in funding, how it would impact Albertans, vulnerable Albertans, those people that are currently insured, those people that have pre-existing conditions, and to look at the full scope of it. We don't expect this report back until sometime later in the spring.

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

Health Care Reform

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday when I referred to the government's third way as health care deregulation, the Premier told me to listen to an Enmax commercial which would advise on the benefits of electricity deregulation. Well, today I'm asking the Premier to listen to the words of Enmax CEO Gary Holden. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the CEO of Enmax stated just last month that "problems . . . with deregulation have discouraged innovation and the costs of regulation have actually increased since 1999," why is the Premier continuing down the same deregulation path with our health care system?

1:40

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I've said before that if the Liberals have any better ideas other than those that have already been assessed, send them over.

Mr. Speaker, relative to Mr. Holden, the CEO of Enmax, I had the opportunity of meeting with him along with I believe it was the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, and he illustrated to me their very simple form to accommodate the regulated rate under so-called deregulation that offers consumers what he considers to be a better way. At no time did he indicate to me that deregulation of the generation portion of electricity undermined anything that they wanted to do.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Holden actually explained at length his concerns publicly with deregulation. Again to the Premier: given that electricity deregulation led to soaring costs, worse service, and dismal choice, why should Albertans have any confidence in this government's health care policies, which amount to health care deregulation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I fail to see where service is bad. Certainly, there were some problems that we ironed out through Government Services and through various departments relative to the retailing of electricity, but for the most part those matters have been sorted out. Enmax is doing a good job. ATCO is doing a good job, as I understand. TransAlta, although they're on the generation side, are doing a good job. So I really don't see what the problem is.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. Again to the Premier: does the Premier see a future in this province in which surgeries for knees and hips and eyes are advertised on TV like electricity products are advertised today? Is that where we're heading?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is entirely up to the physicians and the rules relative to advertising. I don't know what those rules are. I know that we're exposed to a lot of American advertising, and that's the system that we don't want. All we're trying to do is bring health care costs, which total nearly \$9 billion right now, in line with the rate of inflation and to improve access. That is not sinful.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Royalty Revenues

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 21, 2005, a standing policy committee reviewed a draft copy of the Department of Energy's business plan for the years 2006 through 2009. This plan indicated that the percentage of total royalties collected by this government on behalf of the citizens, who own the resources, is going down significantly. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is the total percentage of royalties going down when the value of the resource in this province is going up?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, our royalties are based upon a number of factors. Production and price are the two predominant issues that form how the percentage is calculated. As prices go up, our rates go up. If prices went down, our rates would go down also. As production volumes go up, so would our rate go up. If a well's production volume goes down, so would our rate go down. What it's trying to do is ensure that we get all of the extraction of the resource possible. In any one year the average rate might be up or down, but the fact is that it's worked very effectively to ensure that we extract all the resource that we possibly can, the most of that resource we can, to get the best value for Albertans.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that the Crown revenue share, the portion of the industry's annual net operating revenue that is paid to the Crown as royalty, has decreased by 4 per cent since 2001, how many billions of dollars have Albertans lost because the royalties have not been collected? And don't tell me that we can't afford public health care.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, like I said, we could go back through the mechanics of our structure, which has been very efficient and has provided tremendous value. Some years it will be a higher percentage because of price and production volumes. We have mature fields that you need to replace, and some of them are getting lower in production volumes, so they'll have lower associated rates. That said, we forget that what we're trying to do is receive fair value for Albertans, and that's done through royalties and also through bonus payments. If they would refer to the third quarter that just came out, 14 and a half billion dollars were collected through this industry; \$3.4 billion came through land sales. That's a reflection of how we also receive the economic rent. It's not just the royalty percentage. It's the land sales: \$3.4 billion reinvested to ensure that we do receive that in a substantial way.

Mr. MacDonald: To the same minister: we're not talking about land sales. We're talking about royalties.

Now, to the same minister: given that the Department of Energy has recently completed two studies, the first on a major oil and natural gas royalty rate review and the second a study of how Alberta royalties compare to the lower 48 states, will the minister release these studies and show Albertans how they've been ripped off by the current royalty structure?

Mr. Melchin: Actually, the facts don't show that at all. They show the converse. The various studies, Van Meurs being one of them, show that we have one of the more tough regimes around the world. That said, we have been comparing the specific information. Our royalty and fair-share questions are a combination of two facts, not just royalties, and that's why I brought in land sales. The economic rent, as it's built, that we're trying to receive so that Albertans get their fair share of the revenue, is based upon two factors: royalty and land sales. You can't separate the two because the structure is built to collect both, and in that sense Albertans have received a tremendous value this year from both.

Health Care Reform Consultation

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the health consultation of the government is a sham. At yesterday's meeting of the Tory policy committee the SPC heard from pro-privatization individuals who have been appointed to public bodies by the government. These presentations were often made behind closed doors. To the Premier: how does the government intend to hear the views of ordinary Albertans with this closed-door, under-the-dome process that they have put in place?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond in detail, but I can tell you that it's not a closed-door, under-the-dome process.

Ms Evans: First of all, it was not a standing policy committee. It was registration from individuals and groups that came forward to speak with me. We asked them whether or not they would like to have it open to the public and open to the media. One out of the four selected that. Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat disappointed that they didn't want to have it as open consultation.

We are posting on the web page the ones that will be registered for subsequent consultations. We are asking them if they will be prepared to speak in front of the media, to provide their statements for the media and, if possible, an advance notice of their statements. Currently we have 30 registered in places like Bonnyville and up in St. Paul later on Saturday. I know that there will be a slightly different process.

So it's not only under the dome; it will be in other centres. It's with people in a variety of ways. We are meeting with groups, Mr. Speaker, listening to what they have asked us to share with them.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, if this minister is disappointed that people don't want to speak publicly, why is she accepting secret testimony behind closed doors from pro-privatization proponents? You set the rules.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I would have to speculate about is that some of them had presentations, in one case, where their president was out of town, and they made the presentation themselves. They felt that it was more appropriate for the media to speak to their president than themselves. So they didn't want to publicly make that comment. That was the statement from one. Another group indicated that they had some issues that perhaps weren't as close to the third way but related to the education of the workforce, and they talked about that. They were not prepared to make a public statement.

Mr. Speaker, rather than belittle people that come forward and try and provide this government advice, I think we should celebrate that they have come forward to give us their very best response to the health policy framework.

1:50

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier, if we may: why doesn't the Premier get out from under the dome and go out and talk to Albertans and take some MLAs with him and have public hearings around the province on the government's proposals to gut our public health care system?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I try to get out from under the dome as much as I possibly can. As a matter of fact, I missed cabinet this morning, unfortunately, because I was down in southern Alberta.

I think it's important for people to get out from under the dome, and that's exactly what the minister is doing as she consults with Albertans. There are numerous ways of consulting and receiving input: e-mails, telephone calls, town hall meetings, as the opposition suggests, although they want to do it via an all-party committee. So, Mr. Speaker, we're getting out from under the dome. We're consulting with Albertans, and we're receiving their input.

International Medical Graduate Program

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, being an MLA who represents a very diverse constituency, I meet several foreign-trained doctors, also referred to as international medical graduates. They often access my office to have their documents notarized for residency application purposes. Many of them come to my office year after year applying for residency positions, which, I might add, are few to begin with. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What role does Alberta's international medical graduate program play in improving Albertans' access to health care?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the most important areas where we can improve is to advance the case of the internationally medically trained graduate who comes to Canada and hopes to engage in practice. The ways that we can help them take their qualified licensed approaches from other universities and accredited institutions elsewhere is to provide them an opportunity to work in a residency program under the supervision of qualified and trained teachers in the academic halls of learning, particularly in the universities.

Mr. Speaker, it's a very strong program, and we have increased since 2003 from some 855 to over 900 foreign-trained physicians that have come forward. The announcement we've made today will further increase the number of foreign-trained physicians that are receiving extra support to get their licensure in Alberta in our universities.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, my first supplement is also to the same minister. What will be the overall impact of the \$3 million announced today?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, depending upon the number and the type of residency program chosen, there should be about 14 that will be trained. They will be able to engage in various specialties with the residents. We have had very willing comments back from regional health authorities and from the academics, who have said that this is certainly welcome. We will move up from 28 physicians that are currently taking training to 42, and they will be in a variety of disciplines and will help build our workforce. It's one of the many measures that we are undertaking this year to improve the overall workforce and to make sure that internationally trained graduates have a place to practise here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement is also to the same minister. What other approaches is the minister taking to allow more foreign-trained physicians to work in Alberta's health care industry?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we're also funding 20 new flex-residency seats. These allow foreign-trained and other physicians to take partial residency training when they do not need the full residency program. We're working with mentorship programs and looking at and exploring other options available.

I want to give credit to the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall and other MLAs who have come forward over the past year and a half encouraging us to become more aggressive to engage foreign-trained physicians. Certainly, the Member for Calgary-McCall is an outstanding example of someone who has listened and heard and passed on that message.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Temporary Foreign Workers

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta government representatives and even a cabinet minister have been in contact or visited with leaders of communist governments in Asia about sending temporary foreign workers to work in our Alberta oil sands. The communist bosses like Alberta's idea of binding these workers to work for only one employer. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, and this question is not before a court of law. Is the preferred length of time that this government is recommending to indenture foreign workers to sponsoring employers in Alberta two years, three years, five years, or some other length of time?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, the opposition would find this a problem. We have the hottest economy in Alberta. There are thousands of jobs. It's nice that Alberta is so attractive to everyone in the world to come and work here.

Specifically to this question, of course, our first priority in Alberta is, number one, to sustain the strong economy that we have: thousands of jobs. Our priority is, again, to employ Albertans first, Canadians, aboriginal people, persons with development disabilities, and youth. That is our number one priority in Alberta.

We do have an immigration policy in Alberta jointly done by four ministries, Mr. Speaker. Maybe one of the ministers would like to expand on that. The process: if an employer, for an example, in Fort McMurray wants to bring in temporary foreign workers, the member knows that that process is under the federal government.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's actually under an Alberta government program.

Another question to the minister of human resources. Will these tens of thousands of foreign workers be offered membership in traditional Alberta trades organizations and other unions, or will the larger sponsoring employers have that choice?

Mr. Cardinal: Again, Mr. Speaker, of course it's nice that Alberta is so attractive to the world that everybody wants to move to Alberta. We must have a darn good government to be able to do that.

Ms Calahasen: We've got the best. The best. The greatest leader.

Mr. Cardinal: We've got the best. We are the best, yeah.

Mr. Speaker, in relation to the other issue, of course, again I stress to the person that if an employer wants to bring in temporary foreign workers, first of all they have to meet our conditions in Alberta. I mentioned those in my first question. Second, they have to apply to the federal government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are in the process of setting up a meeting with the new federal immigration minister to determine what direction their policies are going to go in relation to immigration and temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Backs: I haven't seen that with Fort McMurray, Mr. Speaker.

A supplementary question to the minister of health. With potentially tens of thousands of indentured temporary foreign labour flooding into Alberta, will they receive their health care through our public system, a new private system, or some other third way?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, they'll receive their health care, if qualified, after the appropriate waiting period, like anybody else. We would look at the basis of their qualifications. There's nothing further to say, I don't think.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Advanced Education Opportunities

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the government committed to adding 60,000 new spaces to Alberta's postsecondary system by the year 2020, with 15,000 of those spaces created by '07-08. Reports say that so far only enough funding has been put in place to reach about 16 per cent of that target. While new university spaces are important, Albertans in rural areas and smaller centres also need better access to postsecondary education at rural colleges. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education. How many new spaces have been created so far, and specifically how many of those are in rural Alberta?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I first would like to point out that as Minister of Advanced Education it's my job to ensure that we not only think of advancing education in the context of universities and colleges but also understand that it deals with all adult learning. So we're dealing with literacy issues; we're dealing with community learning opportunities as well as apprentices, ESL, and other forms of education. As someone who grew up in rural Alberta, I know that Albertans in rural and smaller centres need to have the same access to advancing their education as people in urban Alberta do.

In the recent Speech from the Throne we indicated that we'd reached 7,000 new learning opportunities, that those have been created in the province this year. Because of the nature of our economy today about 6,000 of them are new apprentice spaces, new learning opportunities for apprentices; 1,100 are new spaces at universities, colleges, and technical institutes. These opportunities have been created across the province. If we look at the rural areas, 271 of those specific spaces at colleges and technical institutes have been created in rural Alberta.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, very quickly, that the colleges that we have around this province have been working with universities to make sure that it's not just the traditional college opportunities that are available in rural Alberta but baccalaureate programs as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess on that note my first supplemental is to the same minister. Given the importance of graduate students and research to the future of our province, how many of these new spaces created so far have been on the graduate program side?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very important question.

Just to finish the thought on the last one, I'd like to indicate, in case people missed it, an example of how distributed learning opportunities are being created in this province. People might have noticed last week that Keyano College, for example, entered into an agreement with SAIT and with the University of Calgary that will involve the three institutions working together to offer environmental, energy, and social work programs to students in Fort McMurray at Keyano College.

Now, with respect to graduate students, under the access growth fund we've responded to the proposals that have been put forward by universities, colleges, and technical institutes, responded to their priorities for growth. Last year \$10 million dollars was put in for nearly 1,100 spaces, as I indicated. We created very few graduate spaces last year, but in the upcoming year institutions have put forward a range of proposals. Those new graduate spaces will be part of Budget 2006, but I might say that over 1,000 new graduate spaces have been created since 1999. Increasing those graduate spaces is very important. It ties into our whole research and development proposal, and other initiatives such as those through the heritage medical research foundation and the ingenuity fund will help to deal with that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you. I guess on the research side, Mr. Speaker, my final question is going to go to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Given that innovation is a key pillar of the government's 20-year strategy, what is his department doing to support research and graduate students?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education referenced a couple of entities already that provide support for research. Through additional research institutes and program expenditures targeted at life sciences, information and communication technology, and energy we've been able to actually increase the amount of sponsored research at universities from less than \$200 million in '94-95 to well over \$600 million last year. This money goes not only to help our researchers but also to support graduate students.

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

Policing Services

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's cities are experiencing such a dramatic growth in population that providing services to communities is becoming a challenge. Perhaps the most serious problem we are facing is the disturbing trend of violence in our neighbourhoods. The tragic and senseless death of a man on an Edmonton Transit bus travelling through Mill Woods has left communities in fear and concern for their safety, and they are looking to government for answers. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Given that police services desperately need to increase their numbers in response to population growth and to have more presence directly in our communities, will this minister commit to increase the level of police funding to major cities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The senseless and tragic murder that took place on Edmonton Transit over the weekend was horrific, obviously, an issue that the family has to deal with now, and our thoughts and prayers go with the family of the deceased.

Again, Mr. Speaker, as we go through these issues, we talk about that issue; we talk about the issue that has just happened in Hobbema as well. These are obviously issues that we have to look at in policing. It's not just about funding. It's about ensuring that the community is there to assist the police. In order to build a strong, safe community, the community has to be involved as well. So it's not all about funding.

But, yes, we have. This past year we've provided funding for not only rural Alberta but, as well, for our municipalities: \$65 million of funding went out to municipalities. Our spring budget, that will be announced in a few weeks, will provide municipalities and, again, our rural municipalities with funding for our RCMP partners as well.

Mrs. Mather: To the same minister: will the minister along with the Minister of Education consider funding and implementing programs in our schools such as a provincial complement to the dare to resist drugs program, that also engage parents to help our children move away from violent lifestyles to healthy choices?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, a very good question. What we have to look at – I'll give you one example, that of the Crystal Meth Task Force, that is being co-chaired by Mrs. Klein and Dr. Bob Westbury. Our ministry made a presentation to them. We have a responsibility in Solicitor General and Public Security regarding, obviously, education and prevention as well as intelligence and enforcement but, as well, healing on the corrections side. So we have a number of areas within our ministry that we have to look at regarding education programs.

I've met with the Minister of Education regarding the CALM program that's in our high schools, which is, again – and the minister may want to speak on this – a compulsory course that every grade 10, 11, and 12 student has to take and has to successfully complete before they can move on towards their high school diploma.

We do have programs in place. Obviously, we want to build on those to ensure that the issues related to conflict resolution can be taught to younger kids so that they have an opportunity to look at ways out of a situation versus using a gun or a knife.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. To the same minister: given that community-based initiatives such as outreach programs and Neighbourhood Watch provide many opportunities for our youth to engage in positive activities, will this minister make the commitment to properly fund these grassroots organizations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, another very good question. We do fund a number of community groups and community organizations, and I'll just give you one example. Two and a half months ago in Hobbema the community cadet program started with less than 40 kids. It's a program run by the RCMP in the community. As of last Wednesday they have almost 400 kids in Hobbema from the four reserves in this program. It's a tremendous program.

So we've seen results. We know that some education and prevention programs that can be in place will take these kids out of gangs, will take them out of being pressured into criminal activity by their peers by providing them with some structure. Now, the program we have in Hobbema we know can work in other areas, not just reserves but in other municipalities as well. In this next year when our budget comes out, we're going to be moving forward to try to get that program moved to other areas in the province.

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

Economic Benefits of Movies Filmed in Alberta

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Economic Development, and it is about the movie *Brokeback Mountain*. I would like to know how Alberta's scenery replicating other places helps Alberta's tourism industry.

Mr. Dunford: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is the challenge, because we know that many people make their holiday plans based on films that they've watched. In fact, one isolated study that we have access to indicates that for as many as 8 out of 10 people that watch a movie, that will impact on their vacation plans and that 1 out of 5 will then actually visit the location. So *Brokeback Mountain* being filmed

west of Calgary, we need to get that information out. It helps when the leading actor, Heath Ledger, for example, goes on Oprah Winfrey and talks openly about filming near Calgary. It's something like 9 million viewers.

In a spirit of keeping the tone nice here today, I just want to ignore the opposition for one moment and say that the fact that *Brokeback Mountain* won three Oscars is going to help. Certainly it raises awareness, and when you have awareness, we must make sure the information is there for the people.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. There is no doubt that a few big films have generated attention, but I would like to know how attention in entertainment magazines brings tourism to West Yellowhead.

Mr. Dunford: Well, it will be quite important for the West Yellowhead area, as indeed any other area in Alberta, to make sure that your regional economic development alliances and other consortia get in on the film business because, one, it's big and, of course, it has a tremendous attraction.

One of the objectives that we have here in this department is to increase the film industry even further. It's important that we provide information to travel magazines. You know, people read the information; they want to get more information. Our travel call centre, by the way, since *Brokeback Mountain*, to get back to that movie, has received a tremendous number of calls. We have presentation location packages covering all of Alberta that we send out to interested producers. I can tell you that the request for this information has actually doubled over this past year. It's a really good story for all Albertans, including members in this House.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is for the same minister. Now that the Oscars have come and gone, what are you and your department going to do to keep up the momentum in increasing tourism in Alberta?

Mr. Dunford: Well, the film industry is going to help us. Something like 53 movies have been made in the past three years, but we've got three particularly big ones that are going to be released this year: Robert Duvall – everybody knows Robert Duvall, I think – and his movie *Daughters of Joy*; Robin Williams with *RV*. Sometime I'd like to tell you my little anecdote of my meeting with Robin Williams down in the Milk River area. Actually, you can't have a conversation with Robin Williams. All you do is hand him a line, and you get a skit. In any event, Brad Pitt's *Assassination of Jesse James* will be out. By the way, when Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie were here in Alberta, one visit to the Tyrrell centre created something like 153 international media press articles about the Tyrrell museum. So this is tremendous. It's big business, it can be big business, and we plan to make it a bigger business.

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

Water Quality at Ellerslie Elementary School

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I asked about the water situation at Ellerslie school yesterday, the Minister of Education stated that he was surprised that I had waited so long to

actually do something about it. Furthermore, the minister stated that the school was in my constituency and that I would be welcome to do something about it. My questions are for the Minister of Education. Given that I personally took that advice, spoke to the board, and continued to work with the affected parents, can the minister inform this House what the Minister of Education has done to fix this problem?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, first of all, it's not my problem, and it's not necessarily his problem either, but I would like the hon. member to know that when he asked this question back on November 17, we acted within 24 hours. We were immediately in contact with the school board to try and find out what the situation there was: was there a problem, and why was this particular member inflaming an issue? Now, the fact is that there was a boundary issue . . . [interjections] I wonder if we could just ask the Liberals to shut up for a minute. Just for a minute because this is important. Okay. I'll ask them not to.

I will just conclude this way, Mr. Speaker. We acted within 24 hours at the member's request. We contacted the public school board. The public school board provided a briefing and indicated that as part of their infrastructure maintenance renewal planning this was on the radar screen.

The water system being provided to Ellerslie is not part of the city water system at the moment, so the water is trucked in there. It's safe water. It's certified by the Capital health authority. There's no reason to inflame the situation. Now, if he knows something other than that, then please tell us.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: given that you stated yesterday that you were under the impression the problem had been dealt with, can the minister please explain how exactly the situation has been dealt with so far?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, let me try this again with perhaps a different wording. Here's how the system works. We have people who run for elected office. They are called public trustees of the school system. They get elected. They have a certain responsibility. One of their responsibilities is – guess what? – schools. They get a capital list together of infrastructure needs for schools and all of the other needs that are pertinent to education in their area. Then they prioritize them. Then they do their best to address them with the funds that we provide to them. We work with them on many of these occasions.

But the bottom line here is that that particular school's water supply is safe. It's trucked in. It's fresh every day. It's certified by the Capital health authority for drinking. So the situation is on another list to be dealt with by the city and by the school board, and I understand it'll happen in either '06 or '07, and the member knows that.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: given your invitation yesterday for me to do something about this problem, is it the position of the minister that the opposition should be giving direction to the school boards? Isn't it the job of the Education minister? It's your job, Minister, not mine.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, I'll be happy to do your job as well.

Now, here's the thing. Mr. Speaker, what I was simply saying is that if the member hadn't heard anything or hadn't been apprised or he hadn't followed up and it took him four months to do that, I was just surprised by that. That's all that was said. I know that when an issue is important to me in my constituency, I follow up with it, and

I track it very carefully, and I try and ensure that the matter gets tended to. I'm sure that the member will learn how to do that in good time, and this is a good start for him.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Environmental Royalty Tax

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday morning the Minister of Environment came up with the sensible idea of levying an environmental royalty tax of some sort to help fund research into new technologies and monitoring. However, all it seemed to take was a phone call from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and within hours the Environment minister was back-tracking on this proposal. My questions are, of course, to the Minister of Environment. Why was the minister so quick to cave in to the pressure from the oil and gas industry and abandon his sensible proposal to levy an environmental royalty to fund research and develop new energy technologies?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, let me reframe the facts of the situation. First of all, Albertans care deeply, as the hon. member does, about the environment. In terms of as we go forward, do we want science and research to be used in improving environmental standards? Unequivocally yes.

2:20

Let me give you an example. In 25 years through science and research, through AOSTRA, in actual fact oil sands development has reduced emissions by 50 per cent because of science and technology. Do I support as the Minister of Environment for the Crown environmental incentives in order to encourage this type of activity? Unequivocally yes, today, tomorrow, next year as well, and in many years to come because it's a long-term solution.

Dr. Pannu: To the same minister. He hasn't explained why he caved in, so I'll ask him another question. Given that the polluter-pays principle should apply to all industry in this province, why is the minister, then, caving in to the pressure from the energy industry by allowing them to dictate environmental policy on research in this province?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, when I became Minister of Environment, I said that I would like to be somewhat like a marriage counsellor because, you know, an actual CEO of an oil company who has children and grandchildren wants to make sure that their children and grandchildren breathe the same clean air, drink the same clean water that I do. In fact, the CBC referred to me, as Minister of Environment coming from Fort McMurray, as the fox in the henhouse. I said: you think my family doesn't want to breathe clean air and drink clean water?

So do I support scientific initiative? Yes, I do. Do we want to incent to attract even more activity in this regard for long-term, sustainable results? Unequivocally yes.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I won't repeat the CBC's description of the minister, but here is the third question: why should the taxpayer continue to be on the hook for negative impacts of oil and gas development rather than having the industry pay through an environmental royalty that he proposes?

Mr. Boutilier: My vision and the gleam in my eye is that I would like to eventually have a long-term sustainability fund, which we do have today, for environmental purposes, for scientific research that will produce results and outcomes that provide long-term solutions for our children and for the hon. member's grandchildren now and well into the many centuries to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Access to Education by Nonresident Students

Mr. Magnus: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked some questions about a 17-year-old from Lethbridge who recently moved to Calgary, where she very much wants to finish her high school. I remain concerned that this young student may not yet be registered at a Calgary high school. My question is again to the Minister of Education. Has this young student been welcomed into a Calgary high school or not?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, the 17-year-old in question has chosen to move away from her home, and as such she is a minor child not living with either parent at the moment. There are some extenuating circumstances here, and if I provide as much information as I think I know about this case, I may be violating some privacy issues. On the other hand, if I don't provide an answer, then of course other accusations will come. So let me just say that the Calgary board of education, I know and I am relieved to hear, have made every effort for the past several days to contact this student, and the student has unfortunately not yet responded to them. [interjections]

Mr. Magnus: Given that some of the opposition don't seem to think this is an important question, my second question: are there any barriers that still exist and are preventing this student from furthering her education?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, it certainly is a very serious issue, and we will do everything that we can from our end to help any of these students or school boards when issues like this come forward. However, we do have locally elected trustees, and they have in turn administrators, who do their best to address awkward and sometimes difficult circumstances such as we're discussing.

To my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, there are no barriers here other than communication. We need the two parties to be able to first of all get in touch with each other. Efforts are being made in that regard, and after that, they'll simply need to assess the student's situation with respect to what courses she has taken, what courses she wishes to take, what sort of a program she wishes to be on: will she be on a legal guardianship type of agreement or classified as an independent student? So there are circumstances like that that aren't necessarily barriers, but they are issues that need to be addressed.

Mr. Magnus: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: who will provide the funding for this young person to attend a high school in Calgary?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, when students are in the K to 9 program, we fund on a per capita or a per student basis, as most people here would know. Once they arrive in high school, we fund on a credit enrolment unit basis specifically those particular courses where credits have been awarded because the course taken has been completed. There's a special formula that works in that respect.

Now, with regard to one particular student who has chosen to live

away from her own domicile and has picked a school of choice elsewhere, quite obviously if that student is able to get in touch with the school board – I know the school board is trying to get in touch with her – then something might, I'm sure, be arranged.

The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that if an arrangement can be made between the family, the minor child, and the Calgary board of education, which I think is the board in this particular case, then she will be obviously taking some high school credit enrolment courses. [interjections] Once she completes those, we will do our very best to fund them. That's how the system of funding works, and we will certainly look at it. We're not immune to these problems, and we do try our best to alleviate them.

The Speaker: There were several interjections there about time. That whole exchange with the three questions and three answers took 3.5 minutes, which is considerably shorter than many others earlier today.

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, by way of an historical vignette today this may be of interest, considering that this is also International Women's Week, March 5 to March 11 of this year. In 1916 Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba granted women the right to vote in provincial elections. On June 17, 1917, in that particular provincial election, Mrs. Louise McKinney won election as an independent in the contested constituency of Claresholm.

In August of 1917 under the province at large category Miss Roberta McAdams was elected as a nonpartisan MLA from this province at large designation for soldiers and nurses.

Louise McKinney was the first woman elected to a Legislature in the British Empire. She earned this designation as Roberta McAdams was not elected until August 17, although both were sworn into the Alberta Legislative Assembly on the same day. These two women were the first women elected to any parliament, again, in the British Empire.

Mrs. McKinney ran under the United Farmers of Alberta banner in 1921 and failed to be re-elected. A number of newspaper articles of the day credited her defeat with her opposition to the use of alcohol and the use of tobacco. In 1925 she was the only woman to sign the Basis of Union, which created the United Church of Canada. In 1928 she was one of five women who petitioned Ottawa for a ruling on the question of women being qualified to sit in the Canadian Senate. She died in Claresholm on July 10, 1931.

On February 8, 1918, Roberta McAdams became the first woman in the British Empire to introduce a piece of legislation, the War Veterans' Next-of-Kin Association. She did not seek re-election in 1921, moved to the Peace River area with her husband and then to Calgary, where she lived until her death on December 16, 1959.

head:

Members' Statements

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

National Social Work Week

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every March social workers throughout Canada celebrate National Social Work Week in recognition of the contributions social workers make to our society. We celebrate in recognition of the valuable role that social workers play in our society. Social workers are a valuable asset to our society in many ways and deserve our sincere appreciation. National Social Work Week celebrates a proud profession with a long history of commitment to improving the well-being of people

in our society. Social workers provide professional assistance to people seeking to overcome personal and social problems in order to lead satisfying, full, and productive lives. They offer services to individuals, families, groups, and communities throughout Alberta.

2:30

I commend all social workers in Alberta for their selfless dedication. I would like to send a thank you to all social workers in Alberta. They don't hear it often enough, but the average Albertan, like myself, does realize the value of their work, and people do appreciate it. This year it's hoped that people will take a few moments to thank someone they might know and express a positive thought about the profession and its impact on the community. I hope all Albertans will join me during this week to recognize the important contributions that social workers make.

Thank you.

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

Alberta Youth Advisory Panel

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to thank a great group of Alberta's youth for the work that they do with the Youth Secretariat, Children's Services, and this government as a whole. These are the youth that sit on the Youth Advisory Panel. These individuals help to give ongoing youth perspective on all work done by the Youth Secretariat and this government. This dedicated group works hard to see that positive changes are made for youth in this province.

There are 17 young Albertans from throughout the province that sit on the Youth Advisory Panel. For example, at the last meeting these individuals discussed topics such as the youth justice system, employment opportunities, secondary education, and the barriers to and opportunities for postsecondary education. Previous meetings have covered topics such as community involvement, housing, community opportunities, and addictions. The panel has had the opportunity to meet with the Premier, the Chief Justice for Alberta, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, presidents of colleges, and many other individuals to discuss issues and challenges related to addictions, justice, and postsecondary education and to offer solutions from the youth perspective.

Not only are these youth working towards providing our government with input on various issues; they are also helping with several other youth-related functions. This past Sunday, March 5, the Great Kids awards took place at Fantasyland Hotel here in Edmonton. Members of the Youth Advisory Panel were on hand all weekend helping with the activities, and I would like to thank them for their involvement. Many of the youth on the panel are, in fact, former winners of the Great Kids awards and are, indeed, outstanding individuals. Their input is very valuable, and I would like to thank these youths for their work.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Pharmacist Awareness Week

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Pharmacist Awareness Week, so today I rise to speak about pharmacists in Alberta. First of all, I want to thank all the professionals working in the pharmaceutical field in Alberta, be they researchers, technicians, or pharmacists.

I want to congratulate the Pharmacists Association of Alberta and their members on a job well done. They serve Albertans to the

extent beyond the normal calls of professional duty. Alberta pharmacists have been internationally recognized with awards for their work to improve patient care. They continue to lead the way internationally to benefit patients through the expanded role of the multidisciplinary health care team.

Alberta pharmacists have pioneered in their professional scope of practice. With their training, qualifications, and knowledge of pharmaceutical science and chemistry, I have more confidence in their profession for drug and medication programs. I am pleased to know that pharmacists expand from the role of mere drug dispensers to the role of drug and medication prescribers. Indeed, our health care system relies on the medication system. Without this pharmaceutical system we have no health care.

I want to bring out an important point, Mr. Speaker, a hidden point really. Our health care system relies on the pharmaceutical system, which is entirely in the realm of private business and for-profit. It starts out with researchers and developers of drugs to cure our illnesses. We rely on manufacturers to produce the drugs for our use, and we rely on the distribution network of pharmacies for the medicine to reach us. Just imagine how this system would be if it were publicly run by the government.

Mr. Speaker, whenever we talk about our health care system, we tend to narrow our thinking only to the work of doctors, nurses, and the space in hospitals, but we need to realize that the manufacturing and supplying of drugs, equipment, and consumable items are a critical part of the health care, and all of these are in the realm of private businesses.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Sporting Events in Grande Prairie

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you are no doubt aware, northwestern Albertans, particularly the ones in the Grande Prairie region, are no strangers to hosting international visitors for a variety of reasons. This past weekend was no exception.

The Natural Luge World Cup had two event stops at the Night-hawk ski area near Grande Prairie. In just 18 months Alberta volunteers, guided by track designers, built a world-class natural luge track that has met and surpassed all requirements for international competition. One European racer commented: it's like Formula One. The Grande Prairie region will now move up to host the 2007 natural luge world championships, which will draw competitors and spectators from 16 countries.

It doesn't end there, Mr. Speaker. The 2006 Ford World Women's Curling Championship is being held in Grande Prairie March 18 to 26. A showcase of the world's premier women curlers from Asia, Europe, and North America will compete in this event.

These successes, Mr. Speaker, are directly linked to Alberta's can-do attitude and our unbeatable spirit of volunteerism.

Thank you.

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

National Child Care Program

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Five months ago the Minister of Children's Services announced a five-point early childhood development and child care plan made possible by an agreement reached with her federal counterpart. The plan provided for significant increases to child care subsidies, assistance for parents wishing to enrol their children in day programs, and improved

professional development opportunities and increased wages for child care workers. Those modest gains are now under threat. The minister recently warned Albertans that if the agreement is cancelled, then the improvements that were made possible would also be in jeopardy. This could prove disastrous for many families.

The federal Conservative plan will not directly create new child care spaces. Their plan will not promote public, not-for-profit care, which we know is the best way to deliver quality child care and early learning services. The families who need it most will likely never see their full \$100 monthly allowance. Families receiving income support through Alberta Works will likely see the \$100 clawed back. The money will also be a taxable benefit, disqualifying many families from income-tested programs.

If this government is sincere about providing choices for women and families, then it should provide real choices, including the ability to choose high-quality, affordable child care. Sadly, at an average cost of over \$500 per month such options are simply not available for many families. I'm urging the minister to do the right thing when she meets tomorrow, I understand, with her federal counterpart and defend and save the agreement reached last year. Alberta families deserve no less.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 7(4) provides for a fourth member's statement today allocated to the government side. Is there any member who wants to do it for two minutes on an ad lib basis?

head: 2:40

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm submitting a petition on behalf of concerned Albertans from Okotoks, High River, Sunset House, and a few other communities petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to

take measures that will require school boards and schools to eliminate all fees for instructional supplies and materials and general school services, including textbooks, musical instruments, physical education programs, locker rentals, lunch hour supervision and required field trips, and to ensure that schools are not deprived of the resources necessary to offer these programs and services without additional charges to parents or guardians.

Thank you.

head:

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Bill 20

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2006.

The proposed amendments in this bill will protect Albertans' personal information from improper access by foreign governments and create fines of up to \$500,000 for violating our laws governing disclosure of records. It will allow newly created government boards and committees to be brought under the FOIP Act more quickly and add circumstances where the act won't apply to public bodies. It will address how the act applies to specific categories of records, including library books and certain records of the internal

auditor and ministers, and build in more time for the Information and Privacy Commissioner to consult with an applicant during the processing of a FOIP request.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 20 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head:

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling an e-mail from Karen Ockerman, an Edmonton-McClung constituent. She's against privatization of health care and feels that the third way is both short-sighted and poorly advised. She ties this into how the government treats our seniors and the way government looks at environmental issues.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a document that I'm tabling on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the Leader of the Official Opposition. This is an article in regard to the Enmax CEO stating: initial introduction of power deregulation a disaster.

The second tabling that I have is also from question period today. This is in regard to a question that I directed to the Minister of Energy. This is a copy of the draft confidential report for the standing policy committee review on October 21, 2005, indicating that in the year 2004 as a percentage the Crown revenue share for royalties was 19 per cent.

Thank you.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon with three tablings, the first of which is a copy of an e-mail from a constituent by the name of Leslie Hall, who is writing about her concerns with the health policy framework. She says that she's "strongly opposed to creating a multi-tiered system that will only serve to augment the already large disparity in quality of life and access to social services in our province."

The second is another letter from a constituent, Janette Pole, again writing to indicate that she's unhappy with the proposal to allow more privatization of health care in Alberta. She says that she feels that as the Premier is "rushing through this before he leaves government, we should wait until the new Premier is in place and take a good hard look at this."

The third, on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition, is from a constituent of his by the name of Martha Dobbin. It's another letter about health care. She's expressing grief based on the fact that "no Conservative MLA appears to be presenting the wishes of her/his constituency in speaking against the Third Way but is rather falling in line with a plan that is obviously against the wishes of most Albertans."

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three tablings, the first from Reny Miklos on health care: retaining a publicly funded, accessible health care system, not violating the Canada Health Act, and concerns over the absence of a lobbyist registry, with private health interests lobbying the government.

The second tabling is from Roseline Bouchie with concerns about insurance companies' qualifications to decide how distribution of what is priority health and not priority health care and double-dipping for doctors.

The third tabling is from Paul Armstrong, director of Alberta Coalition of Concerned Citizens, again on health care, asking that someone explain the logic of taking doctors from the already overtaxed public system and making a couple of suggestions about foreign-qualification doctors and getting them into our system.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table today. The first is a letter from D.W. Irons, who is upset that the government is moving ahead with health care reforms that were not supported at the health summit and that they have contracted with Aon, whose parent company was forced to pay \$190 million in fines for unethical behaviour.

I also have a brochure produced by the Seniors' Action and Liaison Team, which is strongly opposed to the privatization and two-tier health care being proposed with the so-called third way in health care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two documents to table today. The first is an excerpt from the Alberta NDP platform calling for the creation of a green fund to support green transportation initiatives and cleanup of toxic sites.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is an op-ed piece written by my colleague from Edmonton-Calder. The piece calls for adjusting royalty rates to increase the resources we have available to fund important cleanup and sustainability initiatives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk on behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness: a letter dated March 6, 2006, from the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, to Dr. Taft, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, providing preliminary observations concerning the Alberta Liberal opposition report entitled *Creating a Healthy Future*.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Transmittal of Estimates**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I've received a certain message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the 2006-07 interim supply estimates. These interim supply estimates will provide spending authority to the Legislative Assembly and the government until May 31, 2006. It is anticipated that by that date spending authorization will have been provided for the entire fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$5.8 billion for expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$222 million for capital investment, \$28 million for nonbudgetary disbursements, and \$328 million for lottery fund payments.

Interim supply estimate amounts are based on departments' needs to fund government programs and services until May 31, 2006. While many payments are monthly, other payments are due at the beginning of each quarter and at the beginning of the fiscal year. Some payments are seasonal.

head: 2:50 **Government Motions**

8. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that the message from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2006-07 interim estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Government Motion 8. I'd just like to get on the record the fact that I'm a little disappointed that we are once again seeing an interim supply estimate. In my comments a year ago I had indicated that I was more than willing to come back to this Legislative Assembly in early February, and I had indicated then that I would hope that the government would be as willing to do so. If we were here in early February, there would be ample time to deal with the Speech from the Throne and those various responses, and we could be beginning budget deliberations by the end of February. That would allow us ample opportunity to debate a budget in full before the fiscal year-end and thereby eliminate the need for this document and further interim supply.

I indicated last year that the government of Saskatchewan last year for the very first time in the 100-year history of the government of Saskatchewan was asking for interim supply. I cited that because the Finance minister here said that this is normal procedure and, indeed, it is normal procedure. All I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that it wouldn't necessarily have to be normal procedure.

I have a great deal of problem approving \$6 billion in funding to the government without anything more than a single line item for each department. I know that eventually we will see a budget and have an opportunity to debate it, but it causes me a great deal of concern to approve \$6 billion in such a very short period of time without any real understanding of where that money is going or what it's going to be used for.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to anybody else who may wish to comment as well.

The Speaker: Shall I call on the hon. Minister of Finance to close the debate?

Mrs. McClellan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I think you'd have to come back to the Legislature in January, and I guess that's something we can discuss. It does require a certain number of days for budget debate, but this interim supply estimate, as I indicated, is two months of supply for the government. To suggest that a budget this size for the province would not be utilized over that time period would be kind of an interesting thought.

As I indicated in my opening comments – and I understand fully that the hon. member wants to put his concern on the record, and I appreciate that – we do have departments who have services and programs that are funded at the beginning of the fiscal year. I would anticipate a supply motion even if you anticipated that you might get your budget through because I don't think anyone in this Assembly wants to interrupt that good work that's done in our health facilities, in our schools, through Children's Services, and many other programs.

Many of our obligations are on the first of the year, some of them are quarterly, but it is important that that work continue and that the thousands of people who work in this province to provide educational opportunities, health care, and certainly all of the services that we enjoy in this province receive a paycheque at the end of the month. I think they deserve that. Mr. Speaker, this is only until the main government estimates are approved.

I look forward to all of the debate and discussion over the period of the budget debate. I think the hon. member knows that the interim supply estimates cannot reveal the government's spending plans until all budget documents are tabled. I know that he understands that and understands why we debate it in this way. There will be very comprehensive budget information in our fiscal and business plans, and I would be pleased to inform the hon. member that budget day will be March 22.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

9. Mrs. McClellan moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(9) the number of days that Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2006-07 interim estimates shall be two days.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

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

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

To His Honour the Honourable Norman L. Kwong, CM, AOE, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

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

[Adjourned debate March 6: Rev. Abbott]

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to be able to rise today and give my response to the Speech from the Throne. Eight days ago in question period – I want to set a little context for my remarks, first of all – the Premier indicated that he wished I had stayed in radio. Of course, the Premier mentioned a great many things of questionable validity that day, including his comment that the opposition, “would have even less reason for justifying their existence.” Now, I'm sure the Premier wishes that I had stayed in

radio because for all of the media's influence, some of it real, much of it alleged, one thing journalists and talk show hosts cannot do is compel elected officials to appear on their programs to be held accountable. The Premier was able to avoid me for as long as I was just on the radio, and now that I sit nearly across from him in this House, he no longer can.

I don't know whether the Premier privately thinks that I'm a great guy or not, but that's not the point because this isn't about me. Although I submit that the Premier and his many fellow government members have forgotten this after all these years of being corrupted by power, it's not about them either. It's about the citizens of Alberta. It is about democracy. It is about accountability. That's why I was sent here by voters who know that this government is old and tired and out of ideas yet still as undemocratic as ever, unwilling to tolerate dissension, genetically incapable of accepting ideas and advice from outside.

So this government drifts, a victim of its own culture of entitlement: entitlement to make all the rules, entitlement to remain in power, entitlement not to be questioned or held to account, entitlement to do the autopilot thing because, well, they think they're entitled. Well, that drift, that culture of entitlement, that arrogance and complacency and squandered opportunity is not good enough for the people of Alberta. This is about the people. It is about what they want and what they need and what they treasure and what they hope for, and that is not in this Speech from the Throne.

Oh, the same old platitudes are there: warm, fuzzy, mom and apple pie, baseball, hotdogs, and Chevrolet-style bromides that read like they were crafted by some Toronto ad agency copywriter who's trying to sell RSPs or some other product or service that will, gentle reader or viewer, bring you a sense of security and peace of mind as soon as you hand over your money. I don't know. Maybe the guy who penned this masterpiece also does those commercials for life insurance designed to cover the cost of your funeral, you know, the ones where the earnest-looking pitchman reminds us how it only costs pennies a day, and everyone qualifies regardless of age, and you won't need a medical, which is undoubtedly reassuring news in the context of the third way.

Perhaps the guy used to – I don't know – write advertising for the federal Liberals back in the day when the feds spent quadrillions of our tax dollars every year attempting to convince us how good their ideas were. I know the Premier's throne speech eve infomercial only cost 170,000 of our tax dollars. But, yeah, there's been a changing of the guard in Ottawa, and hey, a guy's got to feed the family one way or another.

My point, Mr. Speaker, is that this Speech from the Throne stretches credibility to the breaking point. There's a promise in every paragraph. If the Premier had stayed, well, not in radio but television, he'd remember that the stories you do for broadcast have to have more than a passing acquaintance with the facts. As the *Globe and Mail* said of itself in a recent editorial eviscerating a certain federal election ad, and I quote: we're not making this up; we're not allowed to make stuff up. As a reporter he'd know or should know that the more promises a government makes, the less likely it is to keep any of them. That's not because government is inherently dishonest – well, not just because, in any event – but because the more promises you make, the harder it is to figure out what your priorities are.

Although as someone who just fairly recently left the radio business and finds himself often still viewing this whole process through the jaundiced eye of an old newsy, I note the chicken-and-egg nature of the promise-them-everything school of politics, and I wonder which came first. Did the old federal government and does the current Alberta government lack a vision and a plan and a clear

set of priorities because they both promised everyone everything under the sun? Or do they make all these promises in hopes that they won't notice that they have utterly lost their way?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the constellation of Albertans' hopes and dreams and concerns is undoubtedly contained in that Speech from the Throne, but although you can look up into the sky on a clear night in the country and see those constellations up there, they remain out of reach. However, we can get to the moon. We got there when we made it a priority and developed a plan. The people of Alberta know that the future is very bright indeed, but while the possibilities may be limitless, there are limits on the number of possibilities we can pursue at any one time. We have to set some priorities.

So let's talk about that, and while we're at it, let's talk about a couple of glaring contradictions in the throne speech too. For instance, the throne speech talks about a learning society and a prosperous society and promises that "work will begin or continue on about 60 new schools or major school modernizations, 47 major postsecondary capital projects, and 21 major health capital projects," yet Calgary alone has 40 communities packed with young children without a public elementary school. Less than a dozen schools are under construction. The Calgary Catholic board has been allocated only a fraction of the number of portable classrooms it requested. The Calgary board of education spends \$27 million a year on school busing. Now, \$27 million would pay for, oh, half a dozen elementary schools. Come to think of it, the prosperity bonus cheques would have paid for over 300 schools.

As for the 47 major postsecondary and 21 major health capital projects, well, anyone who would argue their need today in this province is just plain cheap. The Calgary health region, for example, will need something in the neighbourhood of 25 per cent more money in terms of operating funds over the next four years so that they'll be able to staff and run their new facilities. So far there's no operating cash to go with the capital fund for hospital construction and expansion. I know. I know: wait for the budget. That's the standard line.

Glaring contradiction number two: the government's Cancer Prevention Legacy Act. I quote again from the throne speech: "Research indicates that half of all cancers are preventable," and "Bill 1 . . . will establish funding that the Alberta Cancer Board will use to move forward aggressively on cancer prevention." Well, the contradiction is that this is the very same government that last year at this time cut the legs out from under a private member's bill to uniformly ban smoking in all public places right across the province. Why? Did the government succumb to the tobacco lobby? Was it the lobbying from bar owners? Or did they succumb to the same cabal within government? They tried, until they could no longer stand the howls from an outraged public, to exempt the Legislature Building and cabinet ministers' offices from a smoking ban. Whichever, it doesn't matter to whom they caved. They caved – that's the point – on smoking. We know that 45,000 Canadians a year die from smoking-related illnesses, in many cases cancer.

About priorities: the issue here is the need to choose a few, which this throne speech clearly indicates this government has failed to do. I've had a lot of conversations with constituents lately about their priorities, and I'm going to use one conversation that I had a couple weeks ago. It's reasonably representative. I was talking with a guy who volunteers to maintain the outdoor ice rink at one of the community halls in Calgary-Currie. This is one of those salt-of-the-earth people that communities all over this province rely and depend

on to do the basic stuff like provide the ice rink for the community kids – the outdoor rink, that is, in the face of an almost endless chinook this winter, and the ice surface, by the way, was gorgeous.

He told me: "You know, I grew up in this community. When I was a kid, my dad worked; mom stayed home. We were able to buy a bungalow here, close to downtown. We had one car. I walked to school, and I walked to the rink to play hockey, and I walked to the ball diamond in the summertime." He said, "You know, none of these new communities have any of these public facilities that help make communities work." Aha. There's a clue to a priority and, I think, an interesting comment. It spoke to one ordinary Albertan's understanding that this government is no longer delivering value for money, no longer delivering value for the tax dollars he sends from Calgary up here to Edmonton.

He's not asking for the sun or the moon or even a cure for cancer. He's asking why his government has neglected the basics: schools in the communities where kids live; parks and recreational facilities; by extension, enough hospital space to accommodate the sick; quality care for our aging parents and grandparents; space to educate and train the tens of thousands of young people who are turned away by our postsecondary institutions every year; enough money to create some opportunity for our disabled and our disadvantaged rather than barely enough to subsist on; our air; our water; and our nature. Mr. Speaker, those are the basics for which government has a responsibility.

Government's job, government's priority is to create the context in which every Albertan can aspire to his or her full potential: economic, social, and human potential. Good governments do this by providing excellent public services, public goods, and public works, which enable the private sector to be highly productive and globally competitive and enable citizens to be all that they can be. There is great power in communities. There is great power in people, and wise governments recognize this and nurture, encourage, and invest in this. But this government – oh, this government – has neglected too many people and too many communities for too long. Promising them everything under the sun at this juncture isn't going to fool them anymore. The people of Alberta look at our unprecedented wealth and opportunity. They see a government unprepared to lead, and they rightly conclude that we deserve better.

I will be delighted some day to go back to radio, once Alberta has a government that makes its citizens its priority. It's clear, though, Mr. Speaker, that that's going to take a change of government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne, delivered by our hon. Lieutenant Governor. I would like to congratulate His Honour for an impressive first year of service as our province's 16th Lieutenant Governor, and I would like to extend my warmest wishes for his continued success.

I also want to recognize the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Legislature and the 100 years of democracy in Alberta. As my article in the winter edition of the *Canadian Parliamentary Review* explains, we enjoy a very healthy democracy in this province, thanks to the work and dedication of many people who are in this Chamber today, including the Premier, the Speaker of the House, and many other parliamentarians throughout our province's history. We should be proud of our democratic traditions.

We should also take pride in the position our province has taken in this federation. Alberta has become the leader in Canada by such a wide variety of measures. Governments from across the country

look to us for leadership and innovation in how we govern. It took a lot of hard work to get there. I feel confident that this hard work will pay dividends for Albertans for many years to come.

As I think of the many Albertans who have worked hard to get us here, I think of our brave soldiers in Afghanistan and their courageous families, and I realize that they are making sacrifices so that others may have the same kind of democracy that we have. I think of the families in Afghanistan that want all of their children, girls and boys, to go to school to get a good education. I think of the health care in Afghanistan and the little boy who had a cancerous tumour on his face and his grandfather who took him to a Canadian base and to Canadian doctors for help. I think of the people from Edmonton who quickly raised \$10,000 through their church when asked by a soldier to help the little boy die a more comfortable death. I think of how comfortable our lives are, and I say a prayer of thanks for our soldiers, their families, our Canadian values, and our great democratic governments.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne highlighted many initiatives like health, education, infrastructure, and safe communities that benefit Albertans, and I would like to spend the next few minutes talking about how some of these will benefit my constituents in Red Deer-North. All Albertans, including my constituents, will benefit from major investments in infrastructure this year. Red Deer enjoys its geographic position in the middle of the Edmonton-Calgary corridor, which is one of the most productive geographic regions on the planet. To sustain this level of activity, we need more roads, more hospitals, and more schools. I enthusiastically encourage the government's commitment towards ensuring that the province's infrastructure keeps up to its impressive economic performance.

3:10

To continue with this economic performance, we also need a highly-educated and skilled workforce. One way the government plans to achieve a highly-educated workforce is by speaking to youth, parents, business leaders, and educators from across the province through a high school completion symposium to better understand why students leave school early. This is a very important initiative because we need our students to finish high school and to move on to a postsecondary education or into the workforce as soon as possible. Fifteen dollars to \$20 an hour might look inviting to a student for a full-time job. However, this will not satisfy them for long, and returning to school will be difficult. I can still see my daughter's frustration when she realized that she had to upgrade and complete her grade 11 and grade 12 chemistry. As a young adult it was expensive in time and money for her to go back to college to complete courses that she could have completed while she was in high school.

Our workforce needs to grow substantially if Alberta is to keep its competitive advantage. Mr. Speaker, as indicated in the Speech from the Throne, the government will respond this year by developing "a new strategy to increase awareness of Alberta as the [place] . . . for skilled immigrants." The development of this strategy along with the government's added focus on settlement services and language training will go a long way towards attracting the best people to our province to work in their specialized fields.

We have to remember that we also need to have homes for the immigrants who come to live and work in Alberta. The mayor of Red Deer has established the Mayor's Task Force to End Homelessness. I've been told that there are up to 12 people living in a two-bedroom apartment because they cannot find affordable housing. I congratulate our government and the minister of seniors and housing for working to support affordable housing in Alberta.

Thanks to affordable housing grants and Potter's Hands construction, we will add another 95 beautiful, affordable housing units this year to the 225 that have been completed over the last three years in Red Deer.

The Edmonton-Calgary corridor is also home to a substantial segment of Alberta's aboriginal population. These important Albertans need to be included in discussions on solving our labour shortages. We need to find ways for aboriginal populations to take a greater role in shaping this province's future. I am thankful to Olymel, one of our major corporations in Red Deer, for taking the initiative to train aboriginals and to bus them back and forth from Hobbema to their meat processing plant each day. I know that there are other organizations in Red Deer that are committed to good oil field training programs for all Albertans. I am encouraged by new partnerships that are being formed between aboriginal groups, industry, and government.

With increased training for aboriginals will come increased opportunities on Alberta's reserves, and more opportunities on reserves will help aboriginal populations to overcome problems like drug addiction and gang violence. I feel the horror of the mother who ran to her three children who just barely missed being hit by a bullet and had debris sprayed all over them when they were in the bathtub. It is suspected that this frightening incident with three small children was the result of an aboriginal gang shooting.

These problems are not exclusive to reserves. Mr. Speaker, we need to stimulate our youth through education and provide them with opportunities. Such an approach will help to curb the spread and use of crystal meth, which is a problem across this entire province. This is a topic that is very dear to my heart, as I have spoken to many parents in the past year whose children are addicted to this terrible substance. Crystal meth affects every Albertan, whether it's knowing somebody who suffers from addiction, being a victim of a meth-related crime, or paying higher insurance premiums due to sharp increases in property theft.

This is why I so passionately applaud the government for establishing the Crystal Meth Task Force, which will work with AADAC and with law enforcement to reduce the supply and decrease demand for this drug. Along with many parents whose children are abusing drugs, I anxiously await the proclamation of my private member's bill, Bill 202, the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act. This will give parents the tools to help their addicted children through detox and treatment.

I am also very supportive of the government's decision to increase the number of rural and organized crime police in the province last year. In order to seriously tackle the difficult issues related to the spread of drugs, we need more police on our streets.

This year the government has committed to hiring more Crown prosecutors and courtroom staff as well as to appoint more judges. Mr. Speaker, this announcement will be very welcome in Red Deer, where our overcrowded and overworked courthouse is in need of expansion and a new judge.

Albertans will be relieved to see the effect of stronger legislation to protect people from family violence. Albertans deserve to live without fear, and the upcoming amendments to this legislation should make many Albertans feel safer. I am pleased to sponsor Bill 3, the Protection Against Family Violence Amendment Act, 2006, which clarifies the definition of family violence and the definition of victims, which includes seniors and people with disabilities who don't live under the same roof.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans also deserve to have a health care system that they can count on. In the throne speech the Lieutenant Governor indicated that the government will take steps to improve access, sustainability, choice, innovation, and efficiency in Alberta's

health care system. We know that unless we make changes, health care will consume Alberta's entire budget in less than 25 years. This is the same in every province across Canada. I know that I want to leave a health care system that my five children and my five grandchildren will be able to count on too. Improving access, choice, and efficiency is welcome news to the people of Red Deer-North and to every other constituency in this province.

Primary care is an example of an innovative and efficient model of health care delivery that will be expanded this year. Recently the government was able to decrease wait times through the Alberta hip and knee replacement project. This was an innovation that worked and will therefore be expanded to other areas where wait times are just too long.

Mr. Speaker, the expansion of these various programs is an indicator that this government is serious about strengthening the public health care system. In fact, the government has been taking steps to strengthen the public system for several years. I believe they deserve more credit than they receive. It's very easy for the opposition to scare Albertans into thinking that this government intends to completely dissolve the public system in favour of a private system. It's easy for them to tell Albertans that their access to health care services will be based on their ability to pay. But this is extremely irresponsible. The opposition is simply misinforming the public, and they know that they can do so because they are playing on the public's fear.

I ask the public to overcome their fear and embrace some facts. Mr. Speaker, here in Edmonton hospitals are being expanded, at the Royal Alexandra and the University of Alberta. The Stollery children's hospital was built. The Mazankowski Heart Institute is currently under construction. Huge sums of money are being invested in prevention, early screening, and research of cancer. According to the throne speech there are 21 major capital health projects taking place around the entire province. Does it make any sense for a government that is accused of trying to eliminate public health care to be investing so heavily in the public system? It simply doesn't add up. I ask Albertans to consider this before they allow anyone or any group to play on their fears and scare them into thinking otherwise. Our public system is not perfect, but the government has clearly shown a commitment to improving it.

The environment is also a very important part of the government's agenda. We know that if we take care of the environment, the environment will take care of us.

Mr. Speaker, through the Speech from the Throne the government has shown that it is ready to start its second century with an ambitious and exciting agenda. I'm excited about the future that we are preparing for our people. I look forward to working with Albertans to ensure that this century is as successful as the last and that the comforts and values we share as Albertans will be there for another century.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to the Speech from the Throne, which His Honour Mr. Norman Kwong delivered on February 22. Throne speeches, of course, as well as budgets are moral documents because they outline priorities which affect people's lives, their everyday lives. As usual, this throne speech reflects a traditional economic approach, favouring economic growth but overlooking especially the most vulnerable people in our society.

One of this government's favourite words is choice, regardless of the fact that so many low-income people in our communities are

quite limited in the choices that they can make. We hear that mantra over and over again: it's all a question of choice.

3:20

Let's look for a moment at the word "choice." Classical economics has always assumed that human beings are logical, rational, and self-interested, weighing carefully costs against benefits in order to make smart choices which accrue as much profit as possible to themselves. This is the standard model of economic man. However, there's one fatal flaw with this view: this economic man does not exist.

When we look at actual, real human beings, we find all sorts of behaviour. Some behaviour is not in the interest of people. It's quite irrational, undermining their own self-interest. How else can you explain why people continue to vote Conservative year after year when it is clearly against their own self-interest? In real human beings we see everything from quite selfish behaviour, on the one hand, to self-sacrificial, altruistic behaviour, as demonstrated in the outpouring of help for victims of a tsunami or a hurricane.

Ordinary human beings are quite unpredictable, and there is emerging now a new subfield of economics called behavioural economics. I was helped in these remarks by a recent article in *Harvard Magazine*. This new field of behavioural economics, which seems to be getting more and more important in university economics departments across North America, studies how real people make choices. It's very important to understand what they're saying about this whole issue of choice because choice, as I mentioned, is the new mantra of Conservative ideology: choices in respect to daycare, choices in respect to health care.

Behavioural economists tell us that on this matter of choices there is a fundamental tension between the present and the future, between seizing available rewards in the present and being patient for rewards that come in the future. It is obvious that the temptation of the moment is strong. It is called instant gratification. If you ask someone, "Which do you want right now, doughnuts or fruit?" they will say: doughnuts. But if you ask which one a week from now, they will say: fruit. It is common for us to postpone decisions for the future on things that are really important, like quitting smoking or beginning an exercise program or saving money in RSPs. It's also quite common for people, when they get a lot of money, a huge gift, a huge boon of money, to spend it right away. There are so many stories of people who have won lotteries and then a few years later they are bankrupt.

This temptation to spend now, instant gratification, is what this government is leading us into. In Alberta we are blessed by a huge gift from Mother Earth in the form of fossil fuel resources. But what do we do? We spend it. Professor Roger Smith, a respected professor at the University of Alberta, commented in a letter recently published in the *Edmonton Journal* that from 1986 to 2005 Alberta's oil and gas revenues totalled \$86 billion, but of this huge amount the province has saved only \$6.4 billion and spent the rest, a billion here and a billion there, prompting the Canadian Taxpayers Federation in their newsletter to state that the Alberta government has increased spending by 113% not in the last 10 years but in the last couple of years, and "Premier Klein's spending binge makes even the most spendthrift Liberal government in Ottawa look fiscally responsible by comparison."

This government should learn from Odysseus. Odysseus was warned by the goddess Circe that his ship would pass the island of the sirens, whose irresistible singing can lure sailors and their ship onto the rocks. The sirens are a metaphor for the temptation of the moment. Odysseus made wax stoppers and placed them in the ears of his crew. He asked his crew to lash him to the mast, and even

when he pleaded to be released, they were to lash him tighter until they passed beyond the danger. This government needs to lash itself to the mast and develop a long-term savings plan and invest in the welfare of our children and our grandchildren. Without a plan the Alberta ship is being steered by this government onto the rocks. Even in classical economics it has been the belief that during bad times governments should spend money on public works projects to increase employment, but in good times governments should save and save and save.

Last summer I read the fine biography of John Kenneth Galbraith written by Richard Parker. Actually, this book is in our library now. I saw it yesterday. It's a new book, a very fine biography of a great Canadian. John Kenneth Galbraith's career began at the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph and has spanned most of the 20th century, from the depression era to his being an adviser to John F. Kennedy. Galbraith was a great fan of FDR's New Deal, and throughout his career as an economist he never wavered from arguing that during tough times when unemployment is high, public deficit spending on public projects is necessary. But when the economy is racing ahead, as it is now, when you have an overheated economy, what we need is more fiscal restraint.

It is a question of good stewardship. In my career of more than 40 years in the ministry I used that word repeatedly in my sermons: stewardship. It's an important value, that we should be good stewards of the gifts of creation. I noticed that the newsletter of the environmental research centre at the University of Alberta is titled *Partners in Stewardship*. This word has moved out of its religious background into the secular sphere, as it should. It's an extremely important value.

As we look at the huge, wonderful resources we have in this province, which we didn't put there, that are there and we are exploiting, we should remember that we have to be good stewards of that tremendous wealth. I take very seriously the challenge of the Canada West Foundation, which has reminded us of our intergenerational responsibility. The term they use is intergenerational equity. The revenue that flows from oil and gas and coal lying beneath the surface of Alberta is a trust, a gift which should benefit not just people today – that's the instant gratification I was talking about – but it should benefit future generations also, our children and our grandchildren. Again, this government has to lash itself to the mast and exercise wise and prudent stewardship of our nonrenewable resources.

Most people I think were quite surprised by all the attention to coal in both the throne speech and the Premier's infomercial. It may be the case that there are enough coal reserves to last a thousand years, about 33 billion tons, but talk about clean coal is misleading since clean-coal technologies are still in the developmental stage, and many of the most promising developments, such as the converting of coal to gas and liquid fuels . . .

Speaker's Ruling

Parliamentary Language

Referring to a Member by Name

The Deputy Speaker: I'd just like to remind the hon. member of two things. We don't use the word "misleading"; it's been judged as unparliamentary. The other thing I'd like to remind the member is that we don't refer to members of this Assembly by their proper name, so it would be the Premier of the province of Alberta. Please carry on.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't recall making those points at all, but anyway. I didn't mention the Premier at all.

The Deputy Speaker: You referred to the Premier as Premier Klein in your speech earlier on. If you check your script, you'll probably see that. And we have decided long ago that we don't use the term "misleading." It's in the Speaker's handout that was given to all members at the beginning of the session, that that's an unparliamentary usage of language. So if you'd care to carry on without comment.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll check *Hansard* for those mistakes, and I apologize for those mistakes. I wasn't aware.

Debate Continued

Dr. B. Miller: What I was saying about coal is that I think there are many research organizations, such as the Alberta Energy Research Institute and the Alberta Research Council, and also organizations of industry that are working on improving the technologies, so I'm not about to suggest that we shouldn't be moving ahead on that front. In fact, we should be putting more investment of our money into these technologies so that we can have a symbiosis of both respect for the environment and moving ahead in the use of our fossil fuel revenues. It's all a question of our responsibility in being good stewards. I'm afraid that with the government initiatives we're moving ahead too fast and we're moving ahead in such a way that we're showing a great deal of irresponsibility in respect to our environmental responsibility as stewards, and I think that needs to be attended to.

What I find missing in the throne speech also is investment in people. The throne speech has an optimism which is based only on one way of measuring economic growth. The throne speech boasts that Alberta has the highest average incomes in Canada, but it fails to mention that the gap between the rich and the poor is the widest gap in the country. If other measurements were used, such as the genuine progress indicators which you can find on the website of the Pembina Institute, you will see a very different picture of Alberta. Alberta leads the country in gambling addictions, alcoholism, substance abuse, use of food banks, and not surprisingly we have one of the highest divorce rates in the country.

3:30

Mr. Backs: A liquor store on every corner.

Dr. B. Miller: That's right.

The gap between the incomes of the richest 20 per cent and the poorest 20 per cent of Albertans has increased since 1994 by 62 per cent. In 1999 the top 20 per cent earned 14.5 times more than the lowest 20 per cent.

In respect to the way we use up our resources in terms of being consumers, there is something called the ecological footprint: the amount of land we use to meet our basic needs. Albertans have the fourth largest footprint on earth. Albertans on average consume 10.7 hectares of land to meet our needs, and the top 20 per cent of income earners have a footprint of 15.8 hectares.

In light of all those kinds of statistics about our human life and all of the problems that we face in human life in Alberta, it seems to me that this government is creating an immoral society with its out-of-control spending focused on the moment and irresponsible stewardship of our resources neglecting our responsibility for future generations. The throne speech is evidence once again that the Alberta ship is being steered onto the rocks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Caldor.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today in response to the Speech from the Throne on behalf of the people from my constituency of Stony Plain. I would like to begin my speech by thanking His Honour for the work he has done over the past year. His dedication to Alberta has helped to make our province the best place in the world to live, work, and play.

As His Honour mentioned in his speech, last year our province celebrated its 100th birthday. Throughout that special year there were many highlights, including Her Majesty's visit and the amazing fireworks display, which was a perfect ending to the province-wide party on September 1.

Mr. Speaker, the speech delivered last week by the Lieutenant Governor contained the highlights of the government's intentions for the next year. I am very excited about many of the aspects in the speech, including the removal of unnecessary red tape from government processes, the development of a new land-use framework, and the commitment to funding cancer research. In addition to those exciting initiatives for myself and the people in my riding there was another very exciting announcement. The government's initiative to promote and fund clean-coal technology research through the Alberta Energy Research Institute and other agencies is great news for the constituency of Stony Plain.

In the Wabamun area in my constituency there are at least 400 million tons of low sulphur coal lying under the ground. Over the years 150 million tons of this coal have been removed from the Whitewood and Highvale mines to fuel electrical generation. This is the largest coal-producing region in the province, with over 13 million tons of coal being mined annually.

Presently the three coal-fired power plants in the area, Wabamun, Sundance, and Keephills, generate approximately 35 per cent of the power needs of this province. They do so by meeting and exceeding some of the highest environmental standards in North America. These plants have been a big part of the Alberta advantage in regard to providing Albertans with low-cost electricity in an environmentally friendly manner. These operations have also provided employment for approximately 1,000 residents in the area.

The development of clean-coal technology will further reduce any environmental impacts and allow for further development of this valuable resource and provide additional benefits for all Albertans. The development of clean-coal technology is exciting for Alberta and for the residents of the Stony Plain constituency. This new, developing technology will allow Albertans to continue to benefit from our tremendous, abundant coal reserves while protecting our environment for future generations. With the Wabamun plant scheduled for retirement in 2010, that site may offer an excellent location for a demonstration plant to further develop this exciting new technology.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Speech from the Throne delivered a vision of Alberta's future that all Albertans can be proud of. We're living in a time of untold prosperity, and it's important that this prosperity is passed onto future generations of Albertans. That is why I was very pleased to see the government commit to a \$1 billion investment in the heritage fund, the first such investment since 1987. Along with many endowments that the government has funded, the heritage fund will ensure that Alberta will remain strong for many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close by thanking His Honour for his Speech from the Throne. All Albertans are truly blessed to know that we have such a great individual leading our province forward. Thank you.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with great pleasure to respond to the throne speech here this afternoon. It's my observation that the Speech from the Throne should set a tone for the Legislative session. It's a speech that should seek to inspire, as it might introduce concepts that will be later fleshed out into bills during the course of the session. A throne speech speaks more directly to the public than most other speeches and documents that are disseminated from this House; thus it must be equally inspiring and substantive so that the public might know that their interests in the pressing issues of the day are in fact being dealt with in an even-handed and judicious manner.

I'd like to thank His Honour Lieutenant Governor Norman Kwong for his even-handed delivery of the speech and for the manner in which he addressed several areas of concern that all Albertans have a very vested interest in.

I'd like to reply to the throne speech on two fronts, both on what subject matter the speech did include and then what areas of concern the throne speech, in fact, did not address. It's my opinion that the subject material of what this throne speech did not address speaks much louder than the other words which it contains. For this I am deeply concerned and more than a little bit suspicious. So I'd like first to cast a critical eye onto the speech and then discuss what was not there.

In the first section, entitled A Learning Society, this government proposes a series of round-tables to help to understand why students are leaving school early. It is well known that early intervention in the earliest formative years of a student is critical to lifelong learning, so if it is the Learning Commission's recommendation to institute full-day kindergarten, and if we could pass that into law, we would be sure that the next generation of student graduates will be much more likely to in fact graduate. Each dollar that is spent in early education will multiply by six by the time a student reaches high school. This is not even accounting for the enriched and healthier lives that our citizens are more likely to have if they are educated to a high school level and beyond. I am glad the government is facing the embarrassing failure rates for high school students in this province. It is unacceptable, and we have to be honest and brave enough to look at what the reasons for our high failure rates here in this province are.

I was pleased to learn that several infrastructure projects are being fast-tracked for implementation during this next budget year. Twinning highway 63 is a long overdue project, and I'm very pleased to hear that this project will come to fruition soon. Highway 63, as it stands now, is indicative of the lack of planning that went into the development of the oil sands resource here in Alberta.

It's been obvious for at least a decade now that the oil sands were going to develop into one of the world's greatest strategic sources of hydrocarbons. So why didn't this government plan and build the infrastructure to help to nurture this golden egg for then, for now, and for 30 years into the future? Where are the roads, the housing, the infrastructure for the city of Fort McMurray? You have in your caucus a former mayor of this city. Surely he could tell you what is needed up there.

Let's look into the future and see that the oil sands development will carry on and expand into the Peace Country too. Let's be sure to build an infrastructure that will benefit the long-term needs of the north and not just sort of a boom town mentality that's only focused on short-term gain.

A mention of agriculture using biofuel is very laudable but only if there is an integrated plan to encourage this and other alternative fuels to be used by consumers. Our agriculture industry needs plenty of assistance, but as long as the planning for assistance is only of a short-term and of a reactive nature, we will be forever caught in this

cycle of crisis in our agriculture sector. The root of this crisis in agriculture, in my mind, is that there is not enough support and value being placed on the family farm. If biofuel and other value-added enterprises can be directly made to benefit the family farm first and foremost, then perhaps we will see some long-term gain in this regard.

3:40

I'm very concerned about the focus on coal to become the next great energy source in this province. There are way more questions than answers in regard to this enterprise, and you can be sure that I will be casting a very critical eye on the government's intentions in this regard. We know that we have a very significant coal supply here in the province of Alberta, and certainly it supplied us with electricity for a long time. However, my concern is that in order for us to move beyond a hydrocarbon-based economy, we have to start moving in other directions. Certainly, coal is going to be with us for a long time, but do we need to make the lion's share of our investments in our energy future in that particular technology? I would suggest not.

If we're serious about diversification, then we have to make a serious stab at alternative fuel development. That is why I believe that with the riches we have now, which are not going to be around forever, it's imperative that we invest in a significant way into alternative fuels that do not include hydrocarbons. We are in the best and probably only position to do this. Other companies and private enterprise will certainly follow but only if we make our intentions known.

We can see and learn lessons from the United States, that if we're not serious about investing in alternative fuels, then the investment community will not follow suit. If we're going to mimic the national energy policy of the United States, then I think that we're all doomed to failure. Certainly, we know that in the United States there is a strong movement amongst municipalities and states to move past hydrocarbon fuels as the main driver for our energy economy, but there is just this resistance amongst the current federal government in the United States.

Why should we be sticking ourselves with something that is going to be left to the past? We know that we're making tremendous amounts of money off hydrocarbons, and we're all grateful for that, but let's try to invest more pointedly into the future.

When I speak to my constituents in Edmonton-Calder, most often their concerns rest on what the future of our health care system is going to be, the bills that they open each month and find difficult to pay, especially their utility bills, and issues of crime and of safety for their family, security, property crime, and violent crime.

We owe it to our municipalities and, indeed, everyone in this province to have a police force that is commensurate with the huge growth in our population that we've seen over the last 20 years. Our per capita police force presence is not keeping up with the rest of the country. I think it's incumbent upon us at this juncture to look at how we police our province and how we fund it as well. It is a proposal that I put forward – and I will continue to do so in this session – that we need at least 500 new FTE positions across this province to meet the needs of this growing province in terms of policing.

Particularly, I believe that we should be focusing on a community police model to achieve those policing goals. Community policing has had a stamp of confidence, I suppose, from our new municipal police chief here in Edmonton, and certainly it's recognized as a model that works not only in urban areas but also in rural areas. I would urge the government, please, if they could, to consider in this next budget an increase in actual FTEs, not just for replacement but

for actual FTEs, to bring our police force up to the level that our population deserves.

Also, as I said before, when I'm speaking to people in Edmonton-Calder, this health care issue is first and foremost on their minds. You know, I really have to question the sincerity of this government in not being forthcoming as to what their intentions are. I know that there is a baseline of what is being planned for, and I know that it includes some sort of privatization of health care. But, you know, this consultation process that we're in now does not seem valid. I've been speaking to other people: physicians at the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Alberta Medical Association and the nurses. All of them are saying that now they're just being sort of in what feels to be a flippant fashion asked to consult on something that is going to come down in the next 20-some days.

So I think that we do need to reform our health care system; there's no two ways about it. [some applause] I was hoping for a little applause there. But it has to be in a context of a strong public system. There's just too much compelling evidence to suggest that a privatization of our system, even if it runs parallel to a public system, will only result in the reduced capacity of the public system to meet the needs of the public. I think that if we have the very best system possible, then everyone must have access to that in an equal way. It is the strength of the fabric of our society to be able to do so, to give the very best that we have to offer to people when they're in a time of need, and anything less than that I would consider to be not only illogical but, in fact, immoral.

We are in a unique position amongst western developed countries and really any country around the world, where we have a reasonably intact public system. There are many reforms that we can do to make it better, but I refuse to believe that putting a parallel private system or any form of that in place is going to strengthen anybody's access to health care, be you rich, moderately rich, poor, or whatever in between. Even people who are well off can easily be fooled and tricked out of their money by having private options to health care. People think that they, perhaps, can purchase their way into health and are easily a target of nefarious sort of plans when certain people who might lack scruples know that they can take advantage of people when they're ill or when they're sick.

How we look after people who are in need is a measure of what sort of society we are, and I believe that this Legislature has beyond all else a duty to set the tone for our society, that we are indeed a caring society and that we look after each other in an equal and reasonable sort of way.

So thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the upcoming debates.

I would like to please adjourn the debate on this now.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Bill 9

Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006

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

Mr. Shariff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 9, the Income and Employment Supports Amendment Act, 2006.

This bill intends to bring about the following two changes. The first and most important change in the amendment act will update the province's Alberta Works legislation to provide more flexibility in decision-making for grant-funded students. Alberta Works pays

the costs of a person's postsecondary training if they cannot afford to pay for their own training and they are not eligible for student loans. Currently all students applying for grant-funded training have to be out of high school for one year before they are eligible for full-time training grants. The amendment act would make a change to the one year out of school rule so that more exceptions can be made for people applying in certain circumstances.

This rule is there to make an important distinction about who can apply for grant-funded training. Training grants are not intended for every student graduating from grade 12 and looking to begin a postsecondary education. The majority of graduates leaving high school apply to advanced education for loan assistance if they need it, but requiring everyone to be out of high school at least one year before they can get funding help through Alberta Works is not always reasonable for those who would otherwise qualify for assistance.

3:50

The proposed change would benefit, for example, a 20-year-old youth from a developing country who has not completed high school and cannot make any more progress due to his lack of English. As well, he cannot continue in the regular school system due to his age. Under the current rules this person would not get any funding for ESL training or upgrading through Alberta Works because he has not been out of high school for one year. The proposed change would also benefit, for example, a 17-year-old single parent who gets support through Alberta Works to stay in school and finish high school. Under the current rules this student cannot get support for training as a licensed practical nurse because the student has not been out of high school for one year. These are many of the people who may not have the skills to get a job immediately or the options to pursue other avenues while waiting a year to qualify for grant-funded training.

Under the proposed change the one year out of school requirement would be moved to regulation so that government has more flexibility to make exceptions in certain cases. It will help people such as single parents, immigrants, or refugees who need to get on with some training immediately to keep moving forward.

Under Alberta Works government is committed to helping people get the skills they need so that they can increase their income through working and fill the job vacancies in the province's workforce. To do this, we need the flexibility to take individual circumstances into account when deciding who qualifies for grant-funded training. Alberta Works also provides services that help single parents get child support in addition to the financial assistance they receive.

The only other change being proposed through the amendment act is a housekeeping amendment to clarify the minister's authority to establish forms pertaining to child support agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to reply to Bill 9 and, you know, thank the mover for bringing forward this bill, which speaks in some way to some problems with the legislation. While these amendments may not seem to be contentious, the problem with the Income and Employment Supports Act remains. There is much too much reliance on regulations, and there is no way to measure exactly how much people living in poverty truly need. Without indexing rates to inflation and tying them to an accepted measure, such as the market-basket measure, there is no accurate determination of what people need to survive

and to prosper and to do well in our Alberta. Apparently, the government believes it can determine this through regulations.

I think it's imperative that these amendments should have clearly addressed the issue of those who dropped out of school when they were under 18. These teenagers cannot wait for a year or two to get back on track. The purpose of this bill should be to ensure that these kids get the help they need to complete their education and find meaningful employment. However, this amendment is unclear as to whether this will be accomplished. It leaves this determination up to the minister's discretion through regulations. This leaves many questions unanswered and leaves those kids who need support wondering if they can qualify for help to get their lives back on track. Surely, we can do better than just leaving it to regulations.

Again, this amendment is a housekeeping change in some ways to make the regulation-making ability of the minister specific and not implied. However, while there is no problem with some specific changes in this bill in this area, the more global problem here is that almost everything in the Income and Employment Supports Act is subject to regulation and not detailed in the legislation. The main problem with the entire act is that it allows for the content and form of almost everything to be determined in the regulations. While this specific amendment is largely housekeeping, the overriding problem is that this entire act is subject to the minister's or the Lieutenant Governor in Council's ability to make regulations.

The Income and Employment Supports Act allows the minister to make regulations for virtually all areas that this act encompasses. This gives the minister far too much power behind closed doors to alter things like the content and form of support agreements as he likes, and this may not always be in the best interests of the recipients affected. Also, leaving the legislation open to this widespread regulation-making authority makes the legislation itself more like a general framework without forcing the government to comply with real requirements. Regulations allow the government the ability and flexibility to make changes without scrutiny. This is not always in the best interest of Albertans affected by the legislation.

In addition, there is a need for additional amendments to the Income and Employment Supports Act in order to address some of the problems with that act. Most importantly, increasing social assistance rates is a vital step in supporting independence. These rates must be indexed to inflation and tied to this accepted measurement tool, like I mentioned earlier: the market-basket measure. Only by incorporating this MBM, market-basket measure, can the government determine what income support and benefits are needed for individuals and households and what basic necessities actually are. The Income and Employment Supports Act does not define what basic necessities are, and this ambiguity can lead to inaccurate assessments of benefits.

While this specific act, Bill 9, does not address these issues, perhaps it is time that this government takes action that ensures that low-income Albertans have a decent standard of living. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened intently to the mover of the motion, and he gave some logical reasons why we're moving in this direction, but I don't think it answers all the questions. At first glance the proposed amendments appear to increase the number of people who are eligible for income support and acceptance into training programs, and it seems to increase the likelihood that people facing financial crisis may find more

immediate relief for their unemployment issues. Now, I expect that the mover of the motion and the minister would say that that's the purpose, the reason for bringing this bill forward, and that certainly is an important reason.

But, again, it becomes vague when it moves into regulations. It's hard to know how many people would be impacted in this regard. The mover of the motion talked about certain people that it could benefit, and that would be desirable. I guess I worry about the flip side of this, Mr. Speaker. I think that it's possible that we've had this move towards labour shortages and bringing 12-year-old kids into the workforce, and I worry about this potential that, oh, well, if you get out there, if you move away, if you're 16 or 17 and for whatever reason you're out of school and perhaps not with your parents and the rest of it, it would be encouragement to get these sorts of low-entry jobs rather than trying to finish their education. You see, that's a problem when you deal with regulations. We don't know where it's going to take us.

The desirable things that the mover of the motion talked about, certainly, I could support. I think that we all could. It makes sense. But where does it go? Behind closed doors, then, how do we know that it's not being used in this particular regard? We'd say: well, the minister wouldn't do that. Maybe the minister wouldn't, but why do have that in regulations?

So I would say to the mover of the motion: it would be nice to be a little clearer because we do get conflicting things coming from the government. I point out the move towards more child labour out in the workforce. It's hard enough to keep kids in school, but let's say that you've got a 17-year-old that's out of school, and instead of them pushing to finish formal education, we get them into some sort of training for low-entry jobs. It seems that that could be possible here. In the long run are we doing the right thing for that student or not? Probably not in that case. Now, I would hope that that wouldn't be used in that regard, but how do we know? But how do we know? How do we know when we put it behind sort of closed doors on regulations? I wish that the mover of the motion or the minister could at least give us some clarity about what this does mean other than showing the broad strokes that the member talked about, which we all agree with.

4:00

Now, the other problem – and the Member for Edmonton-Manning alluded to it – is this, Mr. Speaker: in this rich province, remember, a lot of young people on Alberta Works, the bulk of them, are probably children of single parents and the rest of it. Income support: I didn't hear anything about this. I thought the minister had alluded that sometime there was going to be at least some increases. Maybe it's coming in the budget; we don't know.

Mr. Cardinal: Stay tuned.

Mr. Martin: Well, I've stayed tuned for a long time watching this government, and I'm getting tired of the tune.

Let's take a look at it. The income support that is currently offered through the program is a pittance, frankly. Here it is, Mr. Speaker: a family of five is expected to survive off \$1,450 a month – \$1,450 a month. Now, to be eligible for child support services, a two-person family cannot make more than \$14,600 a year. That works out to \$608 a month per person. The minister in a government press release related to this bill stated his commitment to "helping people develop their skills so they can increase their income through working . . . To do this, we need the flexibility to take individual circumstances into account." Well, we don't need flexibility to raise those rates. You can't expect anybody to live on that sort of money in this province at this time.

It's hard to know what to do, frankly, with a bill like this. When the mover so eloquently laid it out that we're talking about immigrants and refugees to continue with ESL, all those things are good. All those things, as I say, are good. I would have liked to have seen that there was a commitment, first of all, to increase the rates. Secondly, with all these things happening behind closed doors, there could be a downside to this bill. At some point, perhaps through the second reading or committee stage or the rest of it, if they can clarify that a little more because I think the potential for abuse is certainly there, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes flexibility is good, but sometimes it can go too far.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for questions, comments.

Seeing none, are there any other speakers on the bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to close debate.

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to note that both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in principle agree to the amendments that are being proposed. I do understand that both of them have issues with the global employment and training matters. However, those are outside the scope of the proposed amendments that I'm bringing forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we would like to request from the Government House Leader to return to the Speech from the Throne for two more speakers, so we will do that at this time.

head:

**Consideration of His Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**
(continued)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to give my reply to the Speech from the Throne. First, I must congratulate His Honour the Lieutenant Governor on his fine delivery of the Speech from the Throne and, indeed, the many things he does daily for the people of our great province.

In representing the good people from Edmonton-Manning – and they are all good people, I daresay, for it is truly the best area of the best city of the best province of the best country in the world . . .

Mr. R. Miller: You missed the best universe.

Mr. Backs: The best universe.

Here in Alberta we have no earthquakes. We have no tsunamis. Our floods pale in comparison to other parts of the world, as do our droughts. Indeed, most of our problems would be considered small compared to the difficulties encountered by many others on our small planet.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

An Hon. Member: Thanks to the government.

Mr. Backs: We hardly have any winter anymore, and that's not thanks to the government. Well, maybe it is. We have, though, tremendous resource revenues. We are so lucky.

Here in Alberta we're not beset by religious strife. We do not have suicide bombers blowing themselves up next to peacemakers to make a point. We have not had war on our lands in living memory. We can congratulate and support our soldiers and all of our service members here and afar who are doing so much in the world for Canada and for Alberta.

We have people here who come from more cultural origins than almost any other place in the world has, yet we live in great harmony. We all have a convenient scapegoat in the form of populist eastern Canada, that will become even more fun for this side of the House now that this government's federal Conservative cousins are in power in evil Ottawa. We can yell at all the bad things they do to our Alberta, and I'm sure they will. But Alberta will survive and get better because Albertans will make it so.

This government should have worked harder on ideas for this throne speech. That lackadaisical, lacklustre, and almost lazy throne speech will ensure that we must continue to rely on the people of Alberta to do well despite their government. That throne speech might have been all right for the 20th century, but we're far past that now. The speech talks of a debt-free new year. Well, I remember that just a little over a year ago it was election time, and the government wailed on about how it had defeated a \$23 billion debt. Mind you, this took over 11 years, and this government was a little silent on the fact that it did so with \$63 billion in energy revenues, that no other province had.

During that same time this government managed to savage seniors and health benefits, scare away or anger a lot of our health care personnel, increase tuitions at a higher rate than anywhere else in Canada, not even come close to other provinces in training First Nations people or youth in any numbers, and get a reputation of not doing much of anything for anybody except for the friends of the government. Somebody should put lyrics to a new song: where has all the money gone? By the way, where did that original \$23 billion debt go? Alberta is the place that should have a Gomery inquiry.

I'm glad that the government has decided that it had better start thinking about things. It says that it will start thinking about red tape and do a review. Good to think about it. The proper thing. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business made it clear that Alberta's small business suffers from some of the worst red tape in Canada. We have some of the largest paper burdens, some of the most disorganized regulations, and some of the worst gobbledygook in dealing with government that anyone might hope not to have in trying to start up or grow a business in our Alberta. Where is the money for the red-tape review, and when will we see it? Will we see it this year?

This government says that it is thinking about doing something for our agricultural industry. About time. Agriculture is in its worst price crisis in a generation or more. This government is going to press for something "substantial" at the World Trade Organization. It doesn't know what, doesn't say that it holds much hope, and doesn't know how it's going to get there, but it's thinking about it. "Yeah, we'll give them more farm welfare, or whatever we call that program, and hope they keep quiet," I guess is what the government is saying. And "Keep on voting for the government."

This Conservative government says that it is thinking about the environment. It will hold an environmental youth conference to see what they think. Thinking about it. Sounds good. Good politics. It shows that the government is thinking about the environment: yeah, that's a good one; put that in the throne speech.

This Conservative government wants to show that it's on top of the high school dropout program. It will think about it. It will hold a symposium and ask everyone, even kids: "Why is that? We can't really figure that out." Yeah, our government is on top of that one.

This Conservative government is even going to ask Albertans what we should do about skills shortages. That's a tough one. I hear some government folks say that they thought the market was supposed to take care of that. "Yeah, well, we'll ask around and see if someone knows what's going on." They're thinking about it.

4:10

I see that the government is going to tighten its secrecy law. Whoops. That's supposed to be called the freedom of information laws. The government will even think – think – about a tuition policy while it pays for tuition increases again this year while still letting them rise again. Thinking hard, though, thinking about it. I actually am happy that the government has responded to the Alberta Liberals' and the Auditor General's, for that matter, moves and calls for bringing improvement to long-term care.

I am pleased to see that there will finally be some response to our calls on this side of the House for increases in social support for those who cannot work. The present levels of support should be an acute embarrassment for anyone in a position of power in our Alberta. Maybe it will take minds off the lawsuit settlement a bit.

I am glad to see a land-use framework in development. I guess that the government has been looking at the land-use policy put forward by the Leader of the Alberta Liberal Official Opposition last fall and has realized that it is time to do something. I don't think the Premier will be throwing that red book at anybody and calling it crap.

I am truly happy that there will be help for cancer research. I am very encouraged that the concepts behind the Alberta hip and knee replacement project have finally been accepted by this Conservative government and will be extended to breast cancer care, coronary artery bypass surgery, MRIs, and CT scans, and prostate cancer care. We on this side of the House will be watching that promise closely. Don't be too slow at speeding those things up, or you will hear about it quickly.

I'm actually sort of happy, kind of wondering about what might happen but about something that will go on and that we will see highway 63 happen with other projects. Many of these have been mismanaged so many times that the jury will be out. We're actually waiting to see what is going to be there and how it is done. Albertans and this side of the House will be watching closely.

I'm displeased that your labour and training policy is still not much, still unacceptable. This government seems to want to do everything to steer kids away from the trades while it talks about attracting them. There is no vocational high school in this city, in Edmonton, anymore. Educational funding policy discourages administrators from funding vocational courses in schools and gives them no incentive to invest in up-to-date equipment or to help to attract fully qualified teacher tradesmen. There is no work in developing true evaluations of proper credit for different types of learning to allow greater mobility and use of learned skills as one moves into other fields.

If we could have a seamless web from a trade ticket to a PhD in terms of credit, as I heard President Sam Shaw of NAIT state at a recent conference, I think many of our skills problems would begin to evaporate. It would be great if parents would get the wise message and pass it on to their kids that to get both a trade and a degree would provide the best life experience and skills they could hope for. It would also pay for the degree.

The fact that we have an incredibly high dropout rate speaks to the lack of relevancy in our schools for many of our youth. The fact that our apprenticeship advancement rate is abysmal, especially in the first two years, speaks to a system in disarray. Why is nothing being done about that? Why do just a few over 5,000 a year graduate with

a journeyman's ticket when we have 45,000 or more in apprenticeships? What's going on? Why does this government allow the practice of multi-skilling, which is actually deskilling, to continue when the real concept should be pursuing greater skills, full journeymanship, and the most important concept of the trades that has been in place for centuries, namely mobility: the high level of skills that allow one to move from job to job in constantly changing workplaces yet still be able to do a job with skill and authority. Why do you continue to kill the building trades? This Conservative government's support of CLAC is scandalous. I've heard people term this CLAC organization the new state union for Alberta, as if we were living in some sort of a Stalinist state, a Stalinist government. Certainly, this government and its compliant labour board have made CLAC happen, but it's really just an easy union of convenience.

Keeping wages and benefits down this way does not attract people to Alberta, and that's bad for business. Why not work with the trades to train people, get apprentices trained through their halls, use the interprovincial mobility programs that are already in place, and maybe cut the interprovincial red seal exam cost from \$460 to \$60, a figure that was mentioned in the House just the other day? Make it easier. Work with the trades. They'll respect the government for it. Discourage them further, and they'll fight you like you wouldn't believe. Any tradesman who has lasted a few of the winter nights in the Oil Can in Fort McMurray won't be much afraid of taking on a Tory government.

If this government persists in trying to load up the oil sands with indentured labour, with temporary foreign labour, it is certainly looking for trouble. Tens of thousands of temporary, indentured, cheap labourers from communist countries sending their money home will not make people happy in Alberta. Let them move here, let immigrants move here with their families, and you will get to one of the actual things that the government's policy looked for, which is retention, to retain them here and to grow our Alberta.

The actual immigration program that should be concentrated on is the provincial nominee program, and the sector that should be worked on is small and medium-sized businesses, especially in the restaurant and retail sectors. It is the conventional oil patch which is providing 80 per cent of the present growth, not the oil sands. That conventional oil patch is sucking workers from other occupations and small businesses and small towns like some huge vacuum truck.

Assistance in this area for small businesses in both our cities and towns has not come, and the need is for unskilled and semiskilled labour. Some of the members on the government side have spoken to this in their replies to the Speech from the Throne. The need is for unskilled and semiskilled labour as much or more than it is for skilled tradesmen, technologists, and engineers. Why not try to increase mobility with more programs, as has been successful with the engineers in APEGGA in creating its Pacific Northwest mobility program? Again, that word "mobility" comes to the fore. Learn transferrable skills: that should be the key.

In closing, there are more questions asked by this throne speech than I have time to get to and more questions asked than were actually answered. There is no real, imaginative sense of the future, no real framework for a better tomorrow. There are a few good programs, some spending that was long overdue but no real financial framework, little sense of the long term, lots of questions. I think we should enter the 21st century.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to respond to the Speech from the Throne, like the others before me. On the surface the speech is a promise in every paragraph and on every page. All Albertans put their trust into a government to live up to these promises, to be accountable, and to be transparent. These words are right out of the Speech from the Throne.

The first promise is to address labour shortage. Why do we have such a backlog in apprenticeships? Because they can't get to school because of the limited number of spaces. Perhaps this can be addressed by the Minister of Advanced Education. Or, as well, a solution lies within our own labour force: Alberta unions. Why not allow unions to indenture the apprentices on-site, offer training and knowledge right there and now? They have the facilities, and they have the money and the capability. Why not allow this opportunity? Apprentices want assurances that the jobs that they train for today will be there for them tomorrow. Security is what they want, Mr. Speaker, not temporary foreign workers.

A prosperous society was also raised during the speech. This is something everyone can agree on. The promise of a future investment was encouraging news, a billion dollars for the heritage fund, only to find out that the government is taking a billion dollars out. They're putting it in the front door, removing it through the back door. So the question is: where is the investment? Where is the accountability to Albertans?

A promise of better roads came as welcome news to those in the oil patch, those who make the drive to Fort McMurray on a weekly basis. This is about time. There have been far too many accidents, and too many deaths have occurred. The main question is: why did this take so long in coming when the provincial debt has been paid off?

4:20

The throne speech touched on the need to focus on rural development. The government has almost half of its members from rural Alberta. They should already have plans in place. Rural areas this past year have seen food banks, unaffordable housing, coal-bed methane development that has ruined the landscape and rendered the land useless for agricultural development and in some cases the water useless for drinking. The list goes on. Given these events, don't you think it's a bit late for a rural strategy?

Moving down the list of promises, the new catchphrase for alternative energy is coal. I don't know what plans are in place, and I suspect that the government doesn't either. It's one of these on-the-fly policies that we make up as we go along or hope that something comes out of the blue or that technology comes along. How do we get to this coal? Most of it does lie beneath the soil, rich, prime soil on agricultural land. It spreads right through to the Rocky Mountains.

What about the landscape? Reclamation and return to natural state: these are two different concepts. When the coal is extracted, how useful will this land be later? This is the thinking of a tired government that after 35 years is clearly out of ideas. It's evident when the Premier asks the opposition for our ideas. We have to ask: is he serious, and will he listen? This government is of the opinion that if it does come from opposition, it has no merit, but some of the members that sit on the other side have to remember that they did come from opposition.

Constituents from Edmonton-Decore want guarantees that crime, both rural and urban, will be tackled. It appears that this government is soft on crime. It's grown as fast as the economy. Perhaps it's time that judges are given some direction in handing down sentences on drinking and driving, hit-and-runs, assaults, drug offences. Minimum sentences could be in place to protect the public. Perhaps

it would speed up our judicial system and the backlogs that it has already.

Seniors are also on the list of those that need protection from the high price of gas and electricity that was in the form of deregulation. This was promised and would lead to competition and give lower rates. So far we have not seen this competition that deregulation has promised. It has led to higher profits and higher rates, that all Albertans are paying. Where are the lower rates that we expect from the benefits here? When will Albertans see the difference that was promised?

This leads also to deregulation or privatization of our health care system, that we are talking about. The Speech from the Throne talked about choice, a word my constituents have told me that they do not support as yet. Back off is the word. Full public consultation well in advance, not a month in advance, is what was promised. Privatization by this government would be irresponsible and reckless.

I'm reminded from this House that most of the popular vote did not lie with this government but was cast for opposition, an opposition that does have a land-use policy, one that the government says that it's willing to ask for input from the public on. This is a government that already should have one. After 35 years they're still looking for answers because they don't have any. You would think they would have some of the answers and that they would be in place because of the ongoing work with Martha and Henry, the average Albertans, those that were interviewed during the Premier's very expensive commercial on his views about prosperous Alberta.

People travel from around the world to see the vast open rangeland, the majestic mountains, and the lakes, but for how much longer can we boast about the natural riches? The environment, the boreal forest in the north are threatened by the energy, the oil and gas, and the need for expansion. How much longer can we boast about this? Who is going to be the real winner after this boom is gone? The balance needs to be in place for long-term benefits for the next generation, for my children and the grandchildren of this province, for the next hundred years.

The promise that will benefit the next generation and one that was a welcome sight was the fight against cancer. It looks like a promise. If it's properly and carefully administered, it can be a leader world-wide and a leader in Canada. Something like this I can support. It's a disease that, I have said before, has touched us all in some way, shape, or form. We need to get to the root cause of this disease. We need to look at the basics of where it starts. The government had an opportunity when the smoking bylaw was before it and didn't do it. Are they certain that with this \$500 million investment they are going to be putting their money where their mouth is?

I will conclude, Mr. Speaker. I do look forward to the changes that lie before us with the innovation and prosperity that the next hundred years can achieve and that opposition can deliver and will deliver when given an opportunity and a chance. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 19

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My pleasure to rise this afternoon in committee and ask a number of questions regarding the supplementary supply estimates for Community Development. The minister is asking for a total of \$30,200,000, and I have some questions that I would like to ask relative to that.

The first question is regarding the \$200,000 that is referenced for arts development. What I would be curious to know and I'm sure many Albertans would be curious to know – apparently this money is going to be used by the department to act as a liaison for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, Mr. Chairman. I'm wondering how long the department has known that they would be featured at this festival and if, in fact, we couldn't have included this in last year's budget or, if it did for some reason come up on relatively short notice, why this allocation wasn't included in the November supplementary supply estimates, that were passed in this House in November. I'd be curious to know exactly, specifically how the department will be spending that money in Washington, and I do question whether or not it's even appropriate that that money be in the Community Development budget as opposed to International and Intergovernmental Relations.

Now, moving on, there is \$20 million being allocated for a one-time grant to assist with cost pressures for libraries. Mr. Chairman, you will know that the Official Opposition Liberals are big fans of libraries. In fact, last year one of our members, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, introduced a motion that would have seen every Albertan eligible to receive a free library card to provide free access for all Albertans to all libraries. Unfortunately, the government chose not to support that motion, and I really do believe that that's too bad because the value of libraries and, in fact, the value of reading in particular cannot be underestimated. I know that at least one gentleman, who's a superintendent with the Edmonton Police Service, told me that he can walk into any house and tell you within seconds whether or not the children in that household are going to be in trouble with the law as they grow. When I asked him how he would be able to make that determination, he said that he looks for books. I thought that was quite profound.

Certainly, I'm not about to bemoan the fact that libraries are receiving \$20 million. I think that's probably a very good initiative. But, again, the question is to be asked because this is actually more money than was allocated for libraries in the original budget. So why was the amount that would be required by libraries underestimated by such a vast amount that in a supplementary estimate we actually have to give them more than they were originally being given? Another question that I would have is whether or not the \$20 million is going to be distributed evenly amongst all libraries in the province on some sort of a pro rata basis, or are there some particular libraries that need special attention and are going to be receiving the majority of that funding? Those would be questions that I would be interested in hearing the answers to.

4:30

As well, Mr. Chairman, the minister has asked for \$1 million to be granted to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts again, related to the Smithsonian Institution this time and the festival that's going on there, and I'd be curious to know exactly how that money is going to be utilized at the Smithsonian festival. What benefit will Albertans realize from being involved with a festival in Washington,

and how will that benefit be measured? What sort of performance measurements are there going to be so that Albertans can see that, in fact, \$1 million being spent in Washington is returning some value on their hard-earned tax dollars? I need not remind this House that we have an agent in Washington right now, and a lot of people question whether or not we're actually getting value for the money that's spent there, and here we have an example of another million dollars that's being spent in Washington. I think that Albertans have a right to know that there is, in fact, good value being returned to them for that money that's being spent there.

Lastly, in reference to the supplementary supply estimates for Community Development, Mr. Chairman, I note that there's \$9 million that has been granted to the Heritage Park in Calgary. I'm not sure why Fort Edmonton Park in Edmonton isn't getting \$9 million as well. I have a great fondness in my heart for Fort Edmonton Park. It's on my A-list of attractions to point visitors to the city of Edmonton immediately after I send them to the Alberta Legislature, of course, which is at the top of my list. I find the Fort Edmonton attraction to be one of world class, and I'd like to see them receive a little more money too. I'm not sure why that's not happened here.

Again the question is: what is so urgent that we have to apply \$9 million in supplementary estimates to the Calgary Heritage Park as opposed to waiting just only a matter of days now? The minister told us this afternoon that March 22 is the magic day, at which time Albertans will have their first glimpse at the budget for the coming fiscal year. So we're only days away from that, and I'm curious to know what is so urgent that we have to get \$9 million to Calgary's Heritage Park now as opposed to waiting for the budget, which is soon to arrive.

Last year Community Development made 5 and a half million dollars available – 5 and a half million dollars – to one single individual who had a private meeting with the Premier and within minutes walked out with a cheque for 5 and a half million dollars. Here we are now: \$9 million, as I say, may be going to a worthy cause, but I'm not sure whether or not it was made available after a 15-minute meeting.

Those are the questions that I have, Mr. Chairman, relative to Community Development in specific. I know that I have some colleagues with questions on other departments, so I'm going to allow them to ask those questions, and I may well be back in a few minutes.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to ask a few questions about the supplementary supply with respect to the Department of Justice. I note that the supplementary estimate of \$3,720,000 is divided into two parts: \$2,720,000 for additional operating costs resulting from staff salary settlements in 2005-06 and then \$1 million for the Public Trustee to assess and bring forward legal actions on behalf of children in care. In terms of the first amount, the staff salary settlements, I'm not sure how this works and why suddenly this is not covered by the usual budgeting of the department. Why suddenly is there a necessity for additional funds to cover salary increases?

It appears, when you look down through the lines on the supplementary supply budget, that all departments in the Ministry of Justice received a pay increase. Is it all people working in the department, or is it just senior members who received an increase and it's not spread over the whole department? It's not clear, of course, from what we have here.

I was wondering if the minister could explain. There's \$39,000 allocated to the minister's office, line 1.0.1, and \$51,000 allocated to the deputy minister's office. Is that a raise in salary for the minister and the deputy minister? I mean, we'd all like to have those kinds of raises in salary. I don't know what it is.

It's interesting, when we look down through the list, that there is a supplementary increase for every department except for legal aid. It seems to me that legal aid is one of the most important parts of the justice system. It constantly needs more funding because it's the responsibility of the province to ensure that low-income people who cannot afford a lawyer have access to the justice system. It's a very important principle. I know, in talking to clients and to lawyers, that the legal aid system constantly needs attention and needs more support, so it looks bad that there are increases everywhere except for legal aid.

The million dollars for the office of the Public Trustee: that's to bring forward legal actions on behalf of children in care. It'd be interesting to know what these legal actions are and what kind of lawsuits are being brought forward. I'm totally in the dark about that, and it would be nice if the minister would explain that.

Those are the questions I have, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I don't have a lot of questions. One big one. Again, the way we do supplementary estimates and the amount of money that we have pouring through here: in November billions of dollars, and here we are back in March with more supplementary estimates. I could say that we could call these people across the way the tax-and-spend Conservatives because our budgets don't mean anything.

Sure, we're going to debate a budget in March, but probably as soon as we go through the estimates, all of the various department heads will be spending more money on all sorts of things, Mr. Chairman. I think we really have to get a handle on this. Supplementary estimates, I mean, to me were meant, to begin with, to deal with what we'd call emergencies. It could be a flood or a forest fire, things that we can't predict in our budget. That's what it was set up for. Now we pass the budget, and the budget doesn't mean anything. We can do whatever we want. We'll just come back with more supplementary estimates.

As I say, we went through huge expenses in November, and here we are, Mr. Chairman, coming back with expenses again. Now, I thought it used to be that Conservatives were supposed to be very concerned about the fiscal bottom line, and they were supposed to really care about the budget, the bottom line. Well, that doesn't happen with this Conservative government in this province of Alberta.

I'd guess that some of these things that come through supplementary estimates are probably desirable. You know, I mentioned one about the libraries. Well, of course that's desirable, but wasn't that desirable back in March of last year? Shouldn't that have been part of the budget? It seems to me that when we go through all of the departments' budgets, they should have laid out their plan for the year. That's hardly an emergency that just popped up.

4:40

I guess I'm questioning, Mr. Chairman, how we're using these supplementary estimates. Surely, with billions coming through – this is a huge company – there has to be a better way to do things. I say to the members of the front bench over there: if you ran your own business this way, you'd be out of business; you wouldn't have the tar sands pouring the money in.

Well, I think there are all sorts of things that we have to do. We could make this Legislature more effective by having committees deal with the budget on a budget-by-budget basis, like they do in some other areas. I won't hold my breath waiting for it, but that's probably a way we could do it. The major question I would have of this government, to the front bench, is: when are we going to use supplementary estimates the way they were meant to be used and the way they were back when I was a Member of the Legislative Assembly during the Peter Lougheed days? They were meant for emergencies. We weren't passing billions of dollars and things that clearly are not emergencies at this particular time.

Mr. Chairman, it really irks me that the budget that we passed and the estimates that we're going to go through next month, at some point in April – it's going to probably be a waste of time because we'll come back in November and we'll be dealing with supplementary estimates. I hope that it's not billions of dollars, like it was last time. Here we are again, hundreds of millions of dollars a month or so before.

I want to really stress that this government has to get a handle on how they do the public business. I'd stress again that the question is: when are we going to treat supplementary estimates not as a slush fund for each department to spend whatever they want and come back and report after? When are we going to do it the proper way, and supplementary estimates again will be what they're meant to be? They are for emergencies and unexpected things that you could not predict. Surely, you could predict all of the things that we're talking about here in each one of these departments.

As a Legislative Assembly we should be embarrassed by the way we handle the public money in this regard, and certainly that government should be embarrassed, a Conservative government that says that they understand the bottom line. Well, Mr. Chairman, again, they don't understand the bottom line. This has become a slush fund, and as I said, I think that we can do much better for the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to pick up on what the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview had to say because it's interesting and instructive to have the odd conversation with the member and get a little sense of a history lesson of what this place used to be like. He touched on that just a moment ago, of course, when he talked about how supplementary estimates were used for real emergencies back in the Lougheed era.

I'm going to go off on a bit of a personal tangent here for a second, if I can. It sort of reminds me of back in the day when the Taylor family was what we used to refer to as a sitcom family: single income, two children, outrageous mortgage. We had to watch every penny that came through the door because my wife was staying home with the kids, who were very small at the time, and we were trying to get by on one media person's salary. Despite the popular misconception, you know, those of us in the media make absolutely boring middle-class salaries, most of us. So those were a bit lean times, but they were good times, too, because one of the things that it does is bring some discipline to bear on what you do.

In the Taylor family budget we used to record virtually everything. We basically said that if it's a spending item that amounts to less than \$2, like a pack of gum or an ice cream cone – well, actually we exempted ice cream cones. It isn't exactly a slush fund; it's a little harder than slush. That's the one exemption to the rule. We said basically that if it's less than \$2, if it's a pack of gum, we're not

going to track that, but if it's \$2.01, yeah, we will, and anything above that. You know, we still try to do that in the Taylor family budget.

I can see how the members opposite collectively got to the state that we're at today. I can see it just by benefit of having been here as an elected MLA for 15 months. I can see it because in some ways, and still speaking personally here, it's a very different way of being compensated and rebated for your expenses and that sort of thing than out there in the real world, where, you know, you don't get a mileage allowance for your car plus a credit card from the government so that the taxpayers can pay your gas as well.

The one thing that I've noticed over the last 15 months is the incredible river of money, at least compared to that old lifestyle of having a boring, middle-class, media guy's salary, that flows through our lives as MLAs now. In addition to our own salaries, one-third of which is tax free, we get temporary residence allowances, we get mileage allowances, and we get various other opportunities to have our expenses reimbursed. It's a constant money-out, money-in thing. After a while you just start going, "Well, you know, I'm kind of busy; I don't really want to go to all the trouble of tracking all this," and the temptation is there to get sloppy. From the way you didn't used to record anything that cost less than \$2, well, now it's sort of: you know, I could probably get away with not recording anything less than \$40 or \$50. Well, we don't do that in the Taylor family, but I think they do that on the other side of the House. Only they add millions and tens of millions and hundreds of millions and billions of dollars to the figures that they don't do a proper job of tracking.

I think the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is absolutely spot-on when he says that there is virtually nothing in supplementary estimates, in interim supply estimates, which we will debate later in the days to come, I think tomorrow as a matter of fact, that couldn't be predicted, that couldn't have been budgeted for.

I guess my first question would be to the Minister of Finance. Does she really believe that she cannot do a better job and that her ministry officials cannot do a better job of preparing the budget sooner than they do, in advance of when they start, of tracking the money, perhaps tying the hands of some of the big spenders? Or let them spend big. It's not so much the issue of how much they spend; it's how disciplined they are at spending it.

If they say at the beginning of the fiscal year that they're going to spend \$9 billion or \$6 billion or \$1 billion or whatever the department's budget estimate is, then the Minister of Finance can say: "All right. There's your budget. Come see me as we get close to the end of the fiscal year and tell me whether \$9 billion is going to be enough or \$6 billion or whatever." I don't want to just pick on Health, but \$9 billion is the number that we talked about earlier, obviously. Tell me whether that's going to be enough for the next fiscal year or whether you're going to need some more, and then we'll get it into the budget. But don't come to me partway through, whether it's almost at the end of the fiscal year or whether it's, you know, in the fall, and say: "Oh, my gosh. I need another billion dollars. I'm a billion short this week."

I guess I would ask the Minister of Finance: when you're confronted with something like that, when one of the kids comes to you and says, "I'm a billion short, Mom; can you give me a little extra to tide me through until the next time I ask you for more?" why doesn't she just say no? Why does she feel that she can say yes and then come back to this Legislature and say: by the way, I already gave the kids that extra billion dollars, and now I need you to approve it. Talk about a case of closing the barn door after the horse has bolted. Only this is an issue of, you know, willingly and with premeditation letting the horse out first and then coming to the

Legislature and saying: "I let the horse out. The horse ran away. I hope that's okay with you. I can't get the horse back, and now I need you to pay the bill for the search party." I just don't get it.

That's the sort of general area that I wanted to talk about. Specifically, I want to look at Education, and I would like an explanation from the Minister of Education.

4:50

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, the noise level is starting to rise. Could you please cool off? The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has the floor.

Proceed.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like some answers from the Minister of Education, please, about the supplementary estimate of \$11 million "requested to provide increased operating grants from the General Revenue Fund to offset a reduction in the opted-out separate school boards' share of school property tax revenue." Now, I consulted with a couple of my colleagues who have experience at the school board level and indirect experience dealing with school boards. I'm well aware that separate school boards have been allowed for a number of years now, in fact have the constitutional right, to collect their own school property taxes, something that the public boards, the public public as opposed to separate public, do not have the right to do.

I'm a little bit confused here, and I hope the minister will clear this up for me. I'm a little bit confused by: "to offset a reduction in the opted-out separate school boards' share of school property tax revenue." That sounds to me like – well, I'm not sure what it sounds like. It almost sounds like, you know, the boards opted out, but they're now not opting out to the same extent that they were, so we need more money because they're not taking as much. I'm sure it isn't meant to read like that. I would like an explanation of two things: first of all, what this means, and secondly, after all the years that separate school boards have been collecting their own school property taxes, why this kind of snuck up and surprised the Education minister and he went: oh, Mom, I need an extra \$11 million; I'm a little short this week. I'd like an explanation for that.

I'd also like to know if this deals with all separate school boards across the province or whether this is one specific school board. Is this perhaps the Edmonton Catholic school board, which I believe has a deficit of \$10 million? Since that leaves over a million dollars, is the Education minister going to spend that last million dollars hooking Ellerslie elementary school up to a reliable water supply?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That concludes my remarks.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm sort of pleased to rise to speak to the emergency spending that has been brought forward by the government in the 2005-2006 supplementary estimates. I have some questions to the minister regarding the Human Resources and Employment department. I look at the reason the supplementary estimate was requested.

This Supplementary Estimate is requested to provide \$6,100,000 towards the estimated \$11,850,000 cost to the department of the settlement of the Income Supports Class Action. The department will reallocate the remaining \$5,750,000 from lapses in the Skills Investments program.

Seeing that it is in our emergency estimates, I hope that the minister, because this matter was before the courts and now is settled, can speak to it.

One question: is the government expecting to make any payments on this claim before the fiscal year-end, and if not, why does this

have to be in supplementary supply? Where is the emergency nature of this particular item? Indeed, why do we have to even have it here if it is not an emergency? Why do we continue to have so-called emergency funding put forward from time to time to deal with things that are not really pressing? The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview put out some very good arguments on why we should be looking at how our budgetary process is breaking down. He was commended on that by the Member for Calgary-Currie, and I commend him as well for some very cogent arguments in that area.

In terms of where the money came from, part of the monies came from the department for the payment of the income supports class action, some was from the department of seniors, and the remaining \$5,750,000 comes from the skills investments program. Now, these lapses in the skills investments continue to concern me. The same thing happened last year for many millions of dollars. Was this budget too high again this year, or is the government still falling down in skills investments administration? Is it really trying to expand the skill sets for individual Albertans and, indeed, for the economy in general? You know, these questions I think are important. Why are these monies being spent? Why are they being expended? Why is it that skills investments again does not use its budget, does not have its program developed in order to ensure that we're looking to have a properly trained and qualified workforce in Alberta when this seems to be an issue which is at the forefront of government action so often?

Those are some of the questions I have, Mr. Chair. I thank you for the opportunity to speak before this Assembly.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've had opportunity a couple of times now to address supplementary supply at various stages. There is one thing that I thought I should mention, and that is the question of the unfunded liability for the teachers' pension, which doesn't appear anywhere in the supplementary supply estimates. I'm going to have to assume that that means that it's not considered an emergency by this government although many things in this document wouldn't necessarily be considered an emergency. I think it could be successfully argued that this is, if not an emergency, certainly an emergent issue for Albertans. That unfunded liability today sits at approximately \$6.9 billion, of which two-thirds is the direct responsibility of the Alberta government and, hence, the Alberta taxpayer, so about \$4.6 billion that the Alberta taxpayer is on the hook for today. It doesn't show as a debt on the government's books. It shows as an unfunded liability. Nevertheless, it really is a debt, and I think it should be treated as such.

I think you could also argue that the remaining one-third, the share that the teachers currently hold, is also the government's and the taxpayers' responsibility because ultimately it is the taxpayers of the province that pay the teachers. So really you could say that Alberta taxpayers are today on the hook for \$6.9 billion.

The reason why I'm concerned about this and the fact that it doesn't appear anywhere in the supplementary estimates, Mr. Chairman, is that under the current agreement, that was structured in 1992 and that both government and teachers agreed to, this plan will be paid out over the next 54 years at a total cost to Alberta taxpayers of about \$45 billion. Mr. Chairman, under the current economic reality that we have, with literally billions and billions of dollars of surplus, perhaps as much as \$10 billion or even more this year alone, the fact that we could be sitting down and negotiating with teachers and addressing this \$7 billion debt today as opposed to leaving it sit on the books and eventually costing as much as \$45 billion I think makes it an emergent enough issue that we should be discussing it today.

5:00

So not only, Mr. Chairman, is it relevant what's in the supplementary estimates that we are debating today, but I think it's also relevant to discuss some of what's not in the supplementary estimates. Certainly, I do believe that the magnitude of that unfunded liability and the fact that it will ultimately cost Alberta taxpayers \$45 billion if we don't deal with it sooner rather than later is an omission that is worthy of note. I'm wondering why it was omitted. Last week, when the Finance minister gave the third quarter update for the province, one of the little red flags that jumped out at me is the fact that the total liabilities for the province of Alberta have not fallen to the levels that were forecast in the budget that was passed in this House last May, in spite of the fact that we paid \$1.2 billion down on the remaining debt.

This is a fallacy that the people of Alberta need to know as well. The province of Alberta is not exactly debt free. We do still carry a debt load. We have set aside the money to pay that debt load as those instruments become due, but the fact of the matter is that the financial penalties for paying them off early were more than the savings that would have been recognized. So we do still carry debt, and as I say, this past year we paid off \$1.2 billion in that debt. Having said that, our total liabilities have not come down as much as were forecast. So we're in this period of unprecedented economic wealth, more money coming in from the sale of oil and natural gas, particularly land sales, more money coming in than anybody probably ever dreamt, yet our liabilities are climbing versus the budget.

I'm wondering if maybe that's why the government wasn't able to find some money in the supplementary supply to address the teachers' unfunded liability. I don't know if that's the reason or not, but again I think it bears questioning because of the fact that, you know, we can literally either pay now or pay later. We can pay now, deal with the unfunded liability at \$7 billion, or we can pay it out over the period of the agreement at \$45 billion. I'm not a rocket scientist, Mr. Chairman, but I think it's pretty clear that if we have the money now, we should be addressing this issue now as opposed to living with the agreement as it currently sits and costing Alberta taxpayers an awful lot of money that we probably don't really have to be costing them.

So I'll look forward to some response from the Finance minister, hopefully before we vote the supplementary supply, in relation to those questions that I have about the unfunded liability. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make a few comments regarding questions posed by Edmonton-Glenora. I'd like to start at the outset by congratulating him for having very good eyesight. I note that the Ministry of Justice has a total of \$3.7 million in this supplemental estimate of \$1.354 billion, so for him to pick up that relatively modest amount of money is certainly an indication that he's paying attention to the numbers.

The \$3.7 million falls into two categories. The majority of it, \$2.72 million, is required to pay for costs of staff salary settlements. Those are legal obligations of this government, and I'll provide a bit more detail with respect to that. The second is a \$1 million transfer from Children's Services to the Public Trustee. There has been a change in the responsibility with respect to lawsuits involving actions on behalf of children in care. That has been transferred to the Public Trustee from Children's Services, and there is a million dollars that goes along with that. Basically, it's one of those things

where mid-course a policy decision with respect to responsibility has been made. There has been a change in the ministry responsible. As I understand it, the way we do our books in government requires this particular change as part of supplementary estimates.

The specifics with respect to cost of staff settlements are as follows. There's \$1.5 million for increases to management pension plan contribution rates. There's \$910,000 for salary settlements for bargaining unit, management, and opted out and excluded staff at 3.9 per cent, .9 per cent above the originally funded 3 per cent. In other words, there was a settlement in the course of the year for .9 per cent higher than we had budgeted. There was this obligation that must be met. There was \$220,000 for August 2005 increases to salaries of nonlegal managers, once again a mid-term settlement increase. Lastly, there was \$90,000 for salary provision increases to aboriginal organizations providing court worker service.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora rightly noted that as you go down the line items within the ministry, many of the lines do in fact have an increase, but those are in relation for the most part to these salary adjustments. People who receive those are located in the various departments. I can assure the hon. member that the minister is not one of those who is benefiting as a result of this. It may well be that my deputy minister is, but certainly this minister is not. They relate to people within the ministry or who are employed by the Ministry of Justice. They are entitled to salary increases. We are obligated to pay those, and that is why it is there.

The hon. member referenced legal aid. I certainly agree that legal aid is a valuable component of Alberta Justice. The reason that they are not included in this is that we fund legal aid pursuant to a five-year contract, a certain amount of money per year. That money is in the budget. There is no salary increase associated with legal aid because it is operated as a result of the Legal Aid Society. They enter into contracts with people who are employees. We are in the last year of that five-year contract, and we will be entering into a new contract with the Legal Aid Society and the Law Society of Alberta, who is the other party to the contract.

Those are the explanations I have with respect to the Ministry of Justice supplementary estimate numbers.

Mr. Chairman, at this time I would move that we rise and report the progress on Bill 19.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 19.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, do you concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Acting Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We made some good progress this afternoon, and as such I would move that we call it 5:30 and reconvene this evening at 8 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:10 p.m.]

