

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 12, 2006**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 06/04/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon and welcome.

Let us pray. We give thanks for the bounty of our province, our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent and good friend of mine, Earl Dreesen. Earl is a dedicated, long-time teacher and currently teaches math at Innisfail junior and senior high school. Earl and his family share a passion for grain farming at Pine Lake, near my home. Earl has been a long-time supporter of my political career and my association. Earl is accompanied by his son Devin today. Devin is in his first year at the U of A, taking some political science courses. I'd like to thank Earl and Devin for joining us on their school spring break today. Could they rise and all members show them a welcome.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

**Mr. Horner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly a pleasure for me today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House two gentlemen who represent a service club which is well known to all members in this Assembly, the Rotary clubs and Rotary International for Alberta. The first gentleman that I'd like to introduce is Mr. Ed Wilson, who is the incoming district governor for district 5370, as well as Mr. Gordon Boddez, who is the incoming president of the World Community Service society. These two gentlemen as well as a number of others from the Rotary were here today to talk to members about how we might use our process in government to help them do the good work that they do internationally. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Community Development.

**Mr. Ducharme:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the Hon. Emilia Müller, the Minister of State for Federal and European Affairs in Bavaria, Germany. Minister Müller is leading a delegation of senior officials to Canada to learn about our system of government. Germany's system consists of a federal government and 16 state governments. Reforms are under way to define more clearly federal and state responsibilities. Minister Müller and I had an engaging discussion on our respective systems of government this morning and over lunch. I'd ask that our honoured visitors, who are seated in your gallery, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly 48 very talented young people from Dunluce elementary school in Edmonton. They're just neighbours to my constituency office. They are accompanied by two teachers, Mrs. Huk and Miss Wynn. I would like them all to rise and accept the warm welcome of our Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

**Dr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature Mr. Duncan Wojtaszek. Duncan is the executive director of the Council of Alberta University Students, representing 40,000 Alberta university students. He's seated in the public gallery. I would ask my fellow members to give him a warm welcome.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 52 brilliant grade 6 students from Ellerslie elementary school accompanied by their teachers Frances Stead, Tom Jaques, Gloria Spooner, and Miss Tanya Thompson. They are seated in the public gallery. I want to thank them for coming to the Legislature. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 36 students from Northmount elementary school in my constituency. They're a bright group of students from one of my favourite schools. They're also accompanied by three teachers: Mrs. Arsenault, Mrs. McConaghie, and Mrs. Lowes. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great amount of pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special guests that are here representing the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. The CFIB is celebrating their 35th anniversary this year. They have a tremendous history of advocating for small and medium-sized business. Joining us today in the public gallery are Sasha Angus, director of provincial affairs for Alberta and the Northwest Territories, and Janine Halbesma, policy analyst for Alberta and NWT. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mona Oakes and Marj Bouchard. Mona was born and raised here in Alberta, growing up in Athabasca and getting married and settling with children here in Edmonton. Mona is now enjoying the retired life and volunteering at the Calder drop-in centre as the volunteer co-

chairperson of military whist. She and her husband are active coaching a number of sports, including baseball, hockey, and figure skating.

Marj Bouchard has been an active member of the Rosslyn Community League since 1972. She was also active in the Bill Bouchard memorial hockey tournament with her son Bill and his wife, Sherry,\* who have now taken over the tournament. Marj is active with the Calder seniors' centre as the bocce ball director.

Mr. Speaker, I would now ask these two wonderful young people to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the pride of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka: 48 grade 6 students from Lacombe upper elementary. With them today are teachers Mr. Bobb Epp, Mrs. Carrie Lisafeld, Mrs. Christine Graves, Mrs. Jean Kaufmann, Mrs. Leslie Smale, and also parent helper Mr. Brian Nelson. If I could ask them to please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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### Oral Question Period

**The Speaker:** First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

1:40

### Investigation of FOIP Documents

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The saga of the government's secret flight logs continues. Now the Information and Privacy Commissioner has requested that a special prosecutor be brought in to investigate alleged document tampering, allegedly done by an employee of Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation to stall the release of information damaging to this government until after the 2004 election. I doubt that the employee would have taken such action of her own accord. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation – and this skeleton is just a little over a year old; it's not 20. Is the person who allegedly tampered with these documents still involved in processing FOIP requests in the minister's department?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, they're still not certain as to the individual who allegedly tampered with any e-mail, so it's hard for me to say whether, in fact, an individual is still in the department. I can tell you that there have been no individuals removed from the department.

**Mr. Taylor:** To the Deputy Premier: does the Deputy Premier deny that there was any political motivation behind delaying the release of the FOIP flight logs until two days after the 2004 provincial election?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the hon. member is that I have no knowledge of the affair at all.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Deputy Premier again: does the Deputy Premier deny that there were any directives given from any member of government to tamper with the e-mail in question?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Again, Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the hon. member is that I have no knowledge of any individuals being involved in this at all.

**The Speaker:** Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

### Temporary Foreign Workers

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the CNRL Horizon project north of Fort McMurray 50 temporary foreign workers with Shanghai Construction have now moved into camp 2 to work on tank farm construction for that oil sands project. It is common knowledge that 550 more temporary foreign workers are being processed and will move into that camp soon. Thousands of apprentices are waiting for spots at NAIT and SAIT. Many qualified trades workers are available in other provinces. Alberta aboriginals would like to learn and earn and work. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How are Albertan and Canadian contractors to compete on oil sands contracts if foreign contractors with their workforces are given preferential contracts and access to the work?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. No doubt, Alberta has had the hottest economy in North America. We're blessed with many resources and many job opportunities and economic opportunities for the businesses and individuals out there. I've always said in this House that our top priority is to hire Albertans first. Hire Albertans first. Of course, we have aboriginal people, we have persons with developmental disabilities, we have older workers, we have youth out there that we can access. That is the number one priority. Second to that, we bring people from outside of Alberta in Canada to also work and share in those opportunities. If that doesn't work, if a company out there can prove that they have exhausted all resources to get local people to work or Canadians to work, then they do apply – and this member knows that it's not the Alberta government – to the federal system, to the federal ministry of immigration in order to bring in foreign workers. That process is in place. This member knows that.

**Mr. Backs:** The oil sands process for temporary foreign workers was negotiated by this government with the federal government.

To the Minister of Finance: why are the citizens of Alberta making massive tax concessions to encourage oil sands development when they will not and cannot get work on the oil sands developments?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that this comment on development in the oil sands would be more appropriately put to the Minister of Energy, who is very well versed in the activity, the wonderful activity, actually, in our north.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Human Resources and Employment has said a number of times, we have a number of strategies for workforce improvement, looking at employing Albertans first, Canadians next, and then, of course, looking at other workers. There is some suggestion that government should intervene. I have found in my experience that whenever government intervenes in the marketplace, it's not a good thing.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

\*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Advanced Education: what will the minister say to encourage apprentices, thousands of them, waiting sometimes all night for NAIT and SAIT spots, when they see cheap temporary foreign labour flooding this country and eroding their future working conditions and wages?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In terms of apprenticeship systems I think the hon. member knows full well that Alberta has the best apprenticeship system anywhere in Canada. In fact, we train more than 20 per cent of the Canadian apprentices, and we have less than 10 per cent of the population. We have about 1,400 high school students that are getting started in the RAP program.

Mr. Speaker, I'm aware that my estimates are up this afternoon. I'd be happy to provide him with more details then.

**The Speaker:** Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

### Health Care Reform

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the numbers are in, and the third way should be out. Results of a recent poll show that the third way does not have the support of any identifiable group. By gender, by age, by geography, and by political ideology Albertans do not support queue-jumping, private payment, or allowing doctors to work in both systems. My questions today are to the Deputy Premier. Is this government proceeding with third-way privatization legislation this spring that removes the barriers to private insurance and allows doctors to work in both the public and private system? Yes or no?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I understand that it's a Friends of Medicare poll that was released today that shows that about 60% of Albertans are opposed to the third way. I find it interesting that they will take this poll and say that we should act on it when over the last several days I've heard over and over again from the opposition benches that nobody understands the third way. So this is a bit of a travesty, in my mind.

Mr. Speaker, the health minister has stood in this House and commented numerous times on what she heard in her consultations one-on-one and in groups with Albertans. What she heard was that there are elements of the third way that they like very much, and there are elements of the third way that they have concerns about, that we're going to continue to work with them on.

So to give a definitive yes or no today, given all of what I said, would be, I think, quite impossible.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much. My next question is to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. Given that 59% of seniors polled oppose expanding private health care and fear that more costs will be downloaded, what specific actions has the minister designed to assist seniors who face financial hardship if this plan goes through?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am interested in that result that the member has mentioned here and will look into that further in my consultations with seniors. As I explained in this House

yesterday, we have seven programs for seniors in this ministry that are funded significantly through our budget. We have the Alberta seniors' benefit program.

Actually, I'd like to talk about one program that we haven't talked about before in the Legislature, that really does assist our seniors, and that's the Alberta Aids to Daily Living program. There are 80,000 Albertans that are supported through this program, significant funding, a significant increase in the budget this year. That assists our seniors with being independent, with living in the community. I know that it's the only program of its type in Canada, Mr. Speaker, like most of our programs, and they all work holistically together for the independence of our seniors.

I would be pleased to give this member further information regarding all seven. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: after years of teasing, threats, and abandoned privatization plans when will Albertans know exactly what the government plans for our health care system? Give us a date.

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, the only threat on privatization seems to be, to me, in the opposition benches. Frankly, most Albertans that I talk to understand the private sector's role in health care. They understand that the private sector has played a very positive role in our health system for years and years and years and years and will continue to. I think what Albertans understand also is that our health system is a precious, precious system.

Alberta enjoys the best health delivery system in Canada bar none. Mr. Speaker, that's not simply our opinion. That has been well documented by social policy writers in eastern Canada, by *Maclean's* magazine twice stating that the Capital health region right here has the best delivery system in Canada. What we want to do is have a dialogue to ensure that we continue to enjoy this high-quality health system long into the future. To not do that would be irresponsible.

1:50

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the tide against the government's two-tier, private health care scheme, the third way, continues to rise. Today a Friends of Medicare poll shows that fully two-thirds of Albertans oppose two-tier, private health care. Also, today Alberta's NDP opposition launched its website, [www.ndpopposition.ab.ca](http://www.ndpopposition.ab.ca), where Albertans can find out how to take positive action to protect public health care. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier herself visit [www.ndpopposition.ab.ca](http://www.ndpopposition.ab.ca) and learn why Albertans oppose the third way by a margin of 2 to 1?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I've heard the dulcet tones of the opposition leader advertising this on the radio for the last couple of days, and I must say that it did kind of tweak my interest so that I might sit down at my laptop sometime and visit that site.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is: will the Deputy Premier visit the site, which is, by the way, [www.ndpopposition.ab.ca](http://www.ndpopposition.ab.ca), and learn why rural Albertans know that

the third way will cripple health care in small towns and rural Alberta?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this member probably has a little more knowledge about small-town Alberta than my respected colleague across the way. I happen to live in small-town rural Alberta. I happen to have lived in small-town rural Alberta in various parts of this province all of my life, and I happen to interact with people in those small communities on at least a weekend basis now that the House is in and oftener when it is not. I think that what small-town rural Albertans are concerned about is that they continue to receive a quality level of care. I don't hear concerns from them as to whether it's a private-sector delivery model or whether it's a public-sector delivery model. What they do understand is the public pay side of the system.

Mr. Speaker, we have high-quality health services in my communities. We appreciate them, and we enjoy them. We have high-quality health services in this city and the city of Calgary and in our regional hospitals, and I can tell you that rural Albertans appreciate those services as well. So I think the hon. member would do well to come to small-town rural Alberta instead of just a website and find out what's really going on.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: given the strong opposition among Albertans to the third way, will she visit [www.ndpoposition.ab.ca](http://www.ndpoposition.ab.ca) and use the handy e-letter tool on that site to declare the death of the third way?

**Mrs. McClellan:** You know what, Mr. Speaker? I will continue to have conversations and meetings and discussions with Albertans on the important subject of preserving a health system that they cherish. Doing that is not hiding your head in the sand, pretending that everything's okay and that costs aren't accelerating and that we're not expending about \$10.3 billion on health care for 3.2 million people.

This is not an issue in Alberta only. There isn't a Premier in Canada that is not having this discussion. There's not a health minister in Canada that is not having this discussion. I only hope that the opposition parties in those other provinces are more constructive than what I'm finding here.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

### Water Management

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Water for Life strategy is important for our future here in Alberta, and we all agree that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. The mapping, recording, and analysis of our water systems will be part of that ounce of prevention for our water in the fact that many of these underground aquifers and waterways stretch for miles and are interconnected. This base evaluation is critical to have if we are to protect our water supplies and landowners from the loss of our most precious resource. My questions today are for the Environment minister. Will you protect our water resources and insist that all of the data on inventory is completed before allowing drilling and development of new wells and not limit it to 600 metres, which is scientifically inadequate and only an arbitrary number that is not in our best interest?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member raises some very important points that I agree with. However, one point that I think needs to be articulated is that of the 600 metres. You may not be aware, but the scientists and the biologists that we used, in fact, were from some leading environmental groups across this nation. We had Dr. Mary Griffiths from the Pembina Institute, who is not always complimentary to this government but in fact indicated that the approach that we are taking and the distance we are taking is the right approach in order to protect and secure our water today and well into the future.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you. Will the minister take further steps to protect landowners and our water resources by passing regulations that require oil companies to give prior notice to adjacent landowners within one mile of all development activity, including products to be used in and at the well sites?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, as I said in this House in the past, it is the law to protect our land, air, and water. It is the law that we have the strongest regulation. We're the only province in all of Canada that has the standard that we introduced last week. We will ensure that the hon. member's son or daughter will be able to use the basin that's close to him to be able to fish a hundred years from now, if he lives that long, because of the value that Albertans have, and that is that we value our environment, we value our water, we value our land, and we value our air. We are doing everything in order to achieve that objective, and we're doing it as we speak.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Will the Environment minister work with the Energy minister, the E and E, to change the regulation limiting a landowner's ability to hire and be represented by whom he chooses to work with and be present at the EUB hearings?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, not only will I work with this minister, but I'll work with any member in here, any minister, and I will certainly work with you in order to achieve the objective that we want to attain.

**The Speaker:** Ah, the love.

### Capital Planning Process

**Mr. Griffiths:** Mr. Speaker, it seems that a day doesn't go by without hearing about the need for more schools, upgraded health care facilities, improved highways, expanded seniors' facilities, and added infrastructure, such as a new remand centre in Edmonton. My questions today are for the Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation responsible for capital planning. With so many competing capital needs and demands in all corners of the province how does the government prioritize what gets built and what doesn't?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Battle River-Wainwright. Again, we'd like to congratulate him and his wife on the new-generation Albertan that came into this world this year.

Mr. Speaker, the capital planning process, as I indicated yesterday, is really an important one. It's a huge amount of money, and one of the main things that I think people have to be reassured about is that, number one, health and safety are primary issues in considering any type of infrastructure. Secondly, all the departments, the 11 that we work with and will work with in devising future capital projects, have a handle on the usage, the existing conditions, and the future projections that we see coming out of it. So based on all those factors, I think that you'll be very confident in developing a capital plan.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you. To the same minister: recognizing that Alberta is not growing equally or as dramatically in all areas, what special considerations does your department give to rural Alberta, where well-maintained schools, quality health care facilities, and important community infrastructure are just as important and badly needed as in fast-growing centres?

2:00

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. McFarland:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For those of us that have had past municipal experience, I do think we do appreciate that there are four corners to the province. I do think it's really important, not only in lip service, that we do recognize it, and we will through the budget, which, by the way, will over the course of the next three years allocate over \$3 billion to our rural and small urban municipalities. I think that's fantastic, and I think that's the kind of planning we're looking for in the years beyond the next three.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Griffiths:** Thank you. To the same minister: given that the transportation system is key to developing economic and trade opportunities in rural Alberta, how will the minister respond to the transportation needs and opportunities of rural communities in the capital planning process?

**Mr. McFarland:** Well, I think it's a lot of good news that all of us can look forward to. Not only are we devising a plan that will recognize the needs in rural Alberta and urban Alberta, but we also have to remember that within the existing budget – and this will be the difficult part, projecting it beyond the next three years – we're already contributing over \$1,300 per man, woman, and child in the province, versus the nearest province which is about \$400, just on capital investment. How we keep that up is a challenge.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

### Regulatory Review

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 2006 Speech from the Throne states:

This year the government will embark on a comprehensive regulatory review to identify and remove unneeded red tape between Albertans and their government. This will help maintain a competitive edge for business and improve access to services for Albertans.

In a recent survey the percentage of business owners who feel that red tape has indeed increased over the last three years is highest in Alberta at 66 per cent. My questions are to the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Given that the minister estab-

lished a committee to reduce red tape, but Treasury turned down its request for funding, what is the minister going to do next?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, it is true that regulatory review is a very, very important part of this government, and yes we do have money in our budget. There was a small portion that we asked for in our new budget, which is going to be coming up soon, that he can question me on later. But I want to say that this is so important to this government. We do have a certain amount in our budget already. We also are working on all kinds of different efficiencies and maybe some trimming we can do. We have some good employees in our department that said that they would take some extra time from their jobs they're doing to work on this, and we will be going ahead and getting some regulatory review done.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister follow British Columbia's lead and establish regulation benchmarks so that the government and Alberta businesses can actually measure red tape reduction as they go?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, our committee right now, chaired by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, is working on some different types. We may not use the exact same type as British Columbia, but we will definitely show some benchmarks on how we're getting rid of red tape.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** To the same minister: will the minister ensure transparency and accountability and guarantee that regulatory burden reduction counts are going to be publicly released or publicly shared, again like they do in B.C.?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, this government takes a lot of pride in showing transparency in everything we do, and it will be done in this also.

### EUB Hearings on Electricity Transmission Line

**Dr. Morton:** Mr. Speaker, last year the Energy and Utilities Board approved the need for a new 500 kV transmission line from the Genesee power plant to Langdon and chose a corridor through the heart of the eastern slopes area. The proposed transmission line has elicited strong landowner opposition all along this western route, and opponents have asked why they chose the western corridor over the less populated and less environmentally sensitive eastern corridor east of highway 2. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Will the new EUB hearings that have been called reconsider the question of which corridor – east, west, or central – would be the most appropriate, or is it just reconsidering different options for routes within the western corridor?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's correct: the Energy and Utilities Board, in response to a request for variance application from a number of people on the western corridor, as mentioned by the hon. member, has decided to re-open a hearing to make sure that everybody would have an opportunity. These are very important questions, that we site these badly needed transmission lines, that we make sure that we've got them located in the right place. That said, this hearing is for those impacted in the west corridor to bring forward their information, to talk about that being the western

corridor or not. It isn't about opening up the discussion of the central and east corridor though it is for them to provide the evidence in anything that we might hear to make sure that the west corridor is appropriate or not appropriate.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you. My supplemental is also to the Minister of Energy. In light of the government's new land-use framework initiative and the criteria of best use, will these new EUB hearings take into consideration Albertans' new appreciation of the eastern slopes' environmental and recreational value?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The original decisions and all of the Energy and Utilities Board will take into consideration those environmental, recreational, technical issues. All of those things are part of what any affected person can bring forward. So those members, if they have special issues that they wish to raise, they are allowed to bring that forth in these hearings coming up likely this summer.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you. My final question is to the same minister. Where do we go from here? What's the next step in this process?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you. It has been announced, as mentioned by the hon. member, that Energy and Utilities Board is going to conduct a hearing on the western corridor for the transmission line, this 500 kV line. That will likely happen somewhere late spring, early summer. The date hasn't yet been selected. That will be announced fairly soon. Those that are interested, I would suggest that if they wish to make an application and be part of that hearing, they should get a request for variance – that's the normal application process – and talk to the Energy and Utilities Board. They could help facilitate how they might be able to appear before that hearing.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

#### Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Progressive Conservative government allows the same land to be sold twice by the same owner, both times for millions of dollars. Now, you can't get that deal at the dollar store. Yesterday in the House the minister of infrastructure tabled documents regarding these dollar deals and stated: "I'm filing today five copies of the agreement for four parcels, clearly showing that, in fact, the land that was in excess would be returned to the vendor." This statement is not true. To the minister of infrastructure: where in this offer-to-sell document that you tabled yesterday in this House does it state that the excess lands would be returned to the vendor? That's document 4213.

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry, but I don't have the document right in front of me. But I certainly can quote out of *Hansard* because I read directly out of *Hansard*, and I do remember that it is item 6 on page one. Number 6. You have to go past 2 and 3. That's where it clearly shows that the land will be returned to the vendor. "Vendor" means the person that sold it, incidentally.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the hon. minister's information, item 6 on this document states: "Time shall be of the essence of this Offer."

Now, my question is to the minister. Why were only choice properties of prime real estate west of the North Saskatchewan River returned to Mr. Shekter for \$1? Why is this special deal being made?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, there are no special deals. As I stated earlier, the fact is that it clearly states that land in excess will be returned to the vendor. Those parcels were quarter sections. So if there's a parcel that's split off in another area, that was part of the original sale.

2:10

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. This is a map that was provided. Given that the government already knew that some of the land would be surplus because the ring road route had already been surveyed, why did you make this deal with Mr. Shekter to return land for one dollar that he turned around and sold for millions?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, as we pointed out before, this is 18 years old. That was before I or even our Premier was in this building.

Now, as far as: why did we do it? I have explained it, but I guess I have to go through it again. When we bought the whole parcel of land, we knew that there was going to be excess land, but the fact is that if we didn't buy the whole piece of land, if Mr. Shekter or his company would have maintained that land, then they would have had to pay for subdivision, go through the whole issue. The fact is that by the province buying it, we don't have to do that subdivision. We were then able to simply survey it out, create a separate title on the lands that were going to be given back that were in excess and that were identified as being excess in the original agreement, and those were to be returned. Now, to make it absolutely legal, you have to charge one dollar, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

#### Siting of Calgary Halfway House

**Ms Haley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The John Howard Society has proposed a halfway house with 32 beds for federal inmates in downtown Calgary. This proposed location is within close proximity of not one school but two elementary schools. It is entirely possible that this facility would house child sex offenders, and having it so close to schools would place the children at risk. It is no surprise that this proposal has been greeted with strong negative reaction from residents in the area. My questions are for the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Does the minister feel that this is an appropriate location for a halfway house?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. First of all, let me say that the John Howard Society is a very respectable not-for-profit organization, that provides programs for inmates coming out of our corrections facilities, both federal corrections facilities and provincial facilities, and they do

provide very good programs to transition offenders back into the community.

The issue, Mr. Speaker, in the two communities of Sunalta and Scarboro is that the facility and the land that they purchased on the site that they planned to build is within two blocks of Sunalta school and five blocks from the Sacred Heart elementary school. The concern that I and many of the residents have is that this will pose a significant risk to those children that are of a very vulnerable age, being in that close proximity to a 32-bed facility that will house sex offenders as well as other offenders from our corrections facilities.

**Ms Haley:** To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what have you done to prevent this halfway house from being built there?

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues that we have to look at. I met briefly with the mayor of Calgary last night as well as having sent him a letter on Monday regarding the concerns that we have regarding the safety and security of not just the children in these two schools but as well children in other locations that are close to facilities such as this.

We want to work in the future regarding how we can manage these types of programs but as well ensure that we are not placing at risk children, young adults, those for whom English is a second language, or others that may have disabilities that are in close proximity or in institutions in close proximity to a facility of this nature.

We're working with the mayor, working with a number of aldermen in the city of Calgary, looking at the possibility of other locations that they could purchase, whether it be private land, city land. In fact, I spoke briefly with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation regarding the possibility of the potential for the purchase of provincial land that might be available in and around the city of Calgary as well.

**Ms Haley:** Well, my last question to the same minister is: what can the residents in and around the city of Calgary do to prevent this from being built in their neighbourhood?

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. In this case the John Howard Society provided a community forum that over 200 residents attended. The question-and-answer type of forum was there and available for them. Obviously, more questions were asked than answers provided, but their concerns are related to the safety and security of their children, as it would be in anyone's community. I support the residents wholeheartedly in contacting myself and in contacting their aldermen and other elected officials as we move forward.

I have a meeting with the federal Minister of Public Safety at the end of this month. We'll be speaking with him regarding this as he is responsible for corrections and looking at these types of locations not only in Calgary or Alberta but, as well, ensuring the safety and security of all children in Canada.

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

#### **Investigation of FOIP Documents** (continued)

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this one-party state a culture has developed where the civil service has become politicized. Bureaucrats believe that their job is to protect the government from bad publicity. This culture is growing and is rampant. Now we even

see examples of altering documents to protect the government immediately before the last provincial election. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. How does this minister justify employees in his department doctoring e-mails to protect the government?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, there's an assumption in that question that I'm not sure is true. I'm not sure if it was a person in our department or who it was that allegedly tampered with an e-mail. The commissioner has not identified. Yes, the commissioner passed it on, but the fact is that the commissioner did not identify. So the assumption that there's someone in our department that did something untoward is purely an assumption.

**Mr. Martin:** I'm sure that the Privacy Commissioner would not be going to this unprecedented move if he didn't think something was there.

My question, simply, to the minister is this: how far up the chain of command was the decision made to alter a November 12, 2004, memo, thereby ensuring that embarrassing details about high-flying Tories didn't get onto the front page of a major daily newspaper shortly before the last provincial election?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I knew absolutely nothing about this incident until sometime after the election. To have an accusation that someone somewhere did something in order to avoid some information – I can't answer that kind of an accusation because the fact is that I do not have that kind of information. I'm not sure why the commissioner sent it on. I assume that he was anxious to try to get to the bottom of it if there was something more to be found by his further review. I assume that's why he sent it on.

**Mr. Martin:** Is this minister saying, Mr. Speaker, that the Privacy Commissioner had somebody go in there for a seven-month investigation – they've been looking into this for a long period of time – and this minister knows nothing about it? Is that what he is telling us?

**Mr. Lund:** That's not what I said. I said that I knew nothing about this so-called tampering of an e-mail. I knew nothing about that. Yes, I knew much about the request for the logs. That was an extremely, extremely expensive adventure that this department had to bear because of the number of logs that had to be looked at. I don't remember the exact number, but I do know that it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 12,000 pieces of paper that had to be gone through, every one of them, Mr. Speaker, in order to fulfill the request that was out there before us. I know all about that part of it, and yes, it did take a long time, and yes, it was a very laborious undertaking. As far as this tampering, I knew nothing about that.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

2:20

#### **Rod Love Consulting Inc.**

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The intrigue continues to grow around the Rod Love affair. At the latest count we have the Premier's former chief of staff being paid \$94,789 for verbal advice, even though the Auditor General condemned this practice following the Kelley Charlebois scandal. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. Given that your ministry employs several well-trained and highly qualified employees, can the minister

tell this House what financial skills and qualifications Mr. Love had that rendered Alberta Finance employees unable to give adequate financial advice? Or was he maybe giving political advice?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely accurate in one thing. I do have some very talented and dedicated staff in Alberta Finance, very capable staff.

I have answered this question on this contract to the best of my ability. I did not enter into the contract. I know no more than I have told this hon. member about that contract. It was for strategic advice, and I expect that is what was received for that. Mr. Speaker, there has been no attempt to hide anything on this. All of the payments to this consulting firm are listed in the blue book that is tabled in this Legislature.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will later today, at the appropriate time, table the guidelines for contracts with Alberta Finance today, and if the hon. member has any questions on any contract that I've entered into, I'd be pleased to answer.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. She tabled those policies a month ago.

Given that Rod Love was a paid political lobbyist for Imperial Tobacco at the same time as being a paid strategic consultant for Alberta Finance, how can taxpayers be assured that Mr. Love wasn't advising this minister to further invest in big tobacco?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, Mr. Love did not – did not – give any advice to this minister. I've already made that clear. I have not entered into a contract with Mr. Love.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the investment management division of Alberta Finance are the people who actually make the investments, not the minister.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Deputy Premier: as Deputy Premier can you advise this Assembly if Rod Love is currently under contract, today, in Montreal to provide strategic verbal advice to this government? Yes or no?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, I could not say either he is or is not. You know, I don't follow the whereabouts of Mr. Love on a daily basis.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

#### Alberta Film Development Program

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta film development program was recently transferred to Alberta Economic Development from Alberta Community Development. My question is for our Minister of Economic Development. Does the transfer mean that our government now views film as a business and not an art?

**Mr. Dunford:** Oh, I love to help out young people, Mr. Speaker. The question, really, is whether we view this as a business and not an art. Certainly, film is an art form, but fortunately for Albertans it's more than that. It's also a business. It's a business that's growing in Alberta. There are tremendous opportunities for young

people within the film industry. It provides them the opportunity for our fantastic postsecondary institutions around the province to get involved in some exciting programming.

Of course, we know that movies and commercials that are being made in Alberta are increasing, and it's for that reason, then, that the government really supports the film industry. It certainly is the intent of this minister to try and grow that industry within Alberta. A way in which to do that and to I think try to take advantage of perhaps synergistic opportunities, film was then transferred to our department. Really, film is a way to market Alberta. We're the department that markets Alberta. I think it's a great fit.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much. My first supplemental to the same minister. There are some film producers that have been saying that they're concerned about changes to the program. What are you changing and why, and wherever did you find the time to do it?

**Mr. Dunford:** Well, the biggest change, of course, is in the budget itself. Our estimates will be up later on in this particular session, but we have had a 10 per cent increase in overall funding. Where the producers are concerned – and perhaps this is advice, then, that members of the House would be able to provide to them should they come forward. Basically, we've removed some of the rules around who could actually film in Alberta. We're not saying now that you actually have to have Alberta producers or Alberta creators or screenwriters, but we're providing the incentive. The fact that the more Albertans that you do have, then of course the more we can provide offsetting funds for those particular costs. We haven't tightened the parameters around travel, by the way.

**The Speaker:** Okay. We'll go on to the third question, please.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the same minister. Will these changes compromise the number of films being made in the province?

**Mr. Dunford:** No, I don't think so. We've had 53 films shot in the last number of years. We think that there'll be more. There's a tremendous upswing in the packages that are being asked for. I think that it's a fun thing for members of this House to be involved in this industry, and I hope that when they get invitations to attend sets, they'll take us up on it. [standing ovation]

**The Speaker:** That was very nice. This Assembly can be very, very classy at times.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

#### Recognition of Time Served in Remand

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are unanimous in their wish to have safe communities, communities safe for their children and safe from criminals. It's the government's responsibility to protect Albertans from criminals getting an early exit from prison, but conditions at the remand centres in Alberta are so atrocious that offenders regularly earn reductions in their sentences of two or three days for every day served in remand. To the Minister of Justice and Attorney General: given that the conditions in the remand centre in Calgary directly resulted in a heroin dealer being given 3 to 1 credit for time served in that facility, can the minister explain what he is doing to deal with this dangerous precedent?



**Mr. Stevens:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right that not only in Alberta but across Canada there is a recognition that there is going to be recognition for time served in remand upon conviction of a particular offence. In Alberta I can tell you that as a matter of standard that time is 2 for 1. In other words, there is a doubling of the time in remand recognized in a reduction in the sentence for the accused who is found guilty or who pleads guilty. I can also tell you that across this country, in many of the jurisdictions, that time is more generally 3 to 1, so on a comparative basis Alberta is doing relatively well, but I can tell you that this condition is not unique to Alberta. It is something that is found across this country.

2:30

**Dr. B. Miller:** To the same minister: given the judge's opinion in the Chan case – and I'll table this case later – that “the reason for giving enhanced credit is the exceptionally hard time that Chan experienced” in remand, can the minister explain how the public can feel safe when criminals are first mistreated in prison and then released early?

**Mr. Stevens:** Mr. Speaker, there's absolutely no doubt that on each individual case the circumstances surrounding the time in remand is part of speaking to sentence, so the hon. member is correct to the extent that he alludes to that in his question. However, the facts of each case are different, and it seems to me that we're not talking about people getting out of jail earlier. What it does is go to the length of the sentence per se, and those are two different things.

**Dr. B. Miller:** To the same minister: given that the new Tory Prime Minister has stated repeatedly that if you do serious crime, you'll do serious time, why are his provincial cousins being soft on crime by allowing drug dealers back into our communities early because this government refuses to construct even one new remand centre?

**Mr. Stevens:** Well, that's an interesting perspective. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this government is not soft on crime. In fact, we have been saying for the last five years that those people who do serious crime ought to do serious time. That is why we have led the way in asking the federal government to change the rules with respect to conditional sentencing. I can also tell you that on the basis of the information that I have seen, Alberta is one of the toughest places with respect to those who are convicted of drug offences. If you go to B.C., for example, I think that something like nine out of 10 people who are convicted of drug offences do not do any time whatsoever. I'm very proud – very proud – of the Crown prosecutors and their success rate with respect to convictions regarding drug offences in this province.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there was during the question period a point of order raised by the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. We will deal with that as we go through the Routine this afternoon.

In a few seconds from now, I'll call upon the first of seven members to participate in Members' Statements, and then, hon. Member for St. Albert, you may move if you wish.

First of all, our historical vignette of the day.

#### Vignettes from the Assembly's History

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, on seven occasions in the history of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, strangers – that is, individuals other than members or officers of the Assembly – have been given permission to attend and address our Assembly on the floor.

In 1935 William Aberhart spoke to the Assembly about the Douglas Social Credit plan before he became a member and Premier of the province later that same year. In 1997 wheelchair athlete and fundraiser Rick Hansen addressed the Assembly on the 10th anniversary of his Man in Motion World Tour. Daniel Novak, page speech contest winner, read his entry to the Assembly in 1999. In 2002 Prince Michael of Kent, cousin of Queen Elizabeth II, addressed the House on the occasion of the Queen's golden jubilee celebrations. In 2005 the hon. Sam Lieberman spoke on behalf of the province's Second World War veterans on the 60th anniversary of VE Day. On May 24, 2005, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II delivered the first ever address by a reigning monarch to the Assembly, and on March 15, 2006, Ray Speaker presented an address on behalf of all former members.

Shortly the Assembly will be asked to give permission to allow Her Excellency the Rt. Hon. Michaëlle Jean, the Governor General of Canada, to attend and address the Alberta Legislative Assembly on May 4, 2006.

head: **Members' Statements**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

#### National Volunteer Week

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next week, April 23 to 29, marks the celebration of National Volunteer Week across Canada. Over the course of this coming week communities and organizations across our province will be recognizing and celebrating the contributions made by Albertans who donate their time and energy to active volunteerism. Citizen service has always been a cornerstone of strong, active communities and is an essential part of our identity as Albertans.

I'm aware of a handful of events taking place in my constituency of Stony Plain recognizing the importance of volunteers to our community and their considerable contributions. On Monday I attended a volunteer flag raising in Stony Plain. I'm sure that there are similar events planned in other ridings in this province.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to recognize our volunteers and to let them know that their tremendous contributions are genuinely appreciated and not taken for granted. National Volunteer Week allows us a wonderful opportunity to do just that. This year's National Volunteer Week theme is Volunteers Grow Community. Volunteerism is indeed a vital part of our communities. The hard work and generosity of volunteers truly do help grow and strengthen our communities. Volunteers are the backbone of our communities. Their contributions are immeasurable.

With that said, I am pleased to recognize the tireless effort of volunteers in my community, our province, and across Canada. Their thoughtfulness and kindness make life better for us all. In a province blessed with an abundance of resources, our volunteers are one of our most important resources of all. Hopefully, by recognizing our volunteers, others will come forward to volunteer their time to improve and build upon what our communities have to offer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Canadian Federation of Independent Business

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to join the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in celebrating their 35th anniversary. Since 1971 the CFIB has been giving small

firms a big voice in the public arena. Best known for high-profile actions with governments on policies like tax, labour laws, and public-sector spending, they have also achieved many behind-the-scenes changes that have meant real dollars-and-cents benefits to all firms.

For example, persistent CFIB lobbying was instrumental in achieving the capital gains exemption, the small business reduced corporate tax rate, and beneficial changes to the Bankruptcy Act, the Small Business Loans Act, and RRSP rules. Recent efforts in Alberta include working to reinvigorate the province's regulatory reform process, providing new research on municipal franchise fees, and encouraging more competition in the retail electricity market for small businesses.

CFIB has 105,000 small and medium-sized business members across Canada, including 9,200 in Alberta. CFIB members determine CFIB policy positions through regular surveys in a one-member, one-vote system. They survey their members on every issue that impacts small business from taxation, shortage of qualified labour, and WCB to health and work/family balance. Lastly, the CFIB is financed 100 per cent by their members, and they do not receive funds from government, banks, or big business.

Mr. Speaker, myself and many other members of this Assembly came to this House with a background in small business. I believe I speak for all of us in offering congratulations to the CFIB for having achieved 35 years of successful advocacy for small and medium-sized businesses in Alberta and across the country.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Highwood.

#### High River and District Health Foundation

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take great pleasure in rising today to recognize the outstanding work of an organization which is very active in my riding. The High River and District Health Foundation recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. This foundation dedicates its efforts towards raising funds to support health care services in both High River and Nanton. This celebration also coincided with the 20th anniversary of the annual hospital dinner held by the foundation. This year the dinner raised \$55,000 towards purchasing a new residents' bus for the long-term care facility in High River.

Great success has been achieved over the past two decades by this organization. Through their efforts multiple programs have been initiated or supported at the High River hospital. The implementation of a cataract surgery program and continued support of surgical and emergency care at the hospital are only two examples of the benefits which are realized due to the work of the foundation.

Part of the success of this foundation can be attributed to the innovation which they have shown in raising funds to support their efforts. In addition to holding an annual dinner, they also hold the Chinook Country Cattle and Grain Roundup. This unique fundraiser accepts donations of not only cash but also grain and cattle. Using the proceeds gained from this, the foundation acquires a herd of cattle, which are then sent to a feedlot which manages them through the winter using the grain and donated cash. In the spring these cattle are sold, and the profits are used to further the goals of the foundation. This is a very innovative way of fundraising and one which I must say is a distinctly rural method of raising funds.

2:40

The other great factor in the success of the High River and District Health Foundation is the exceptionally supportive community in which it operates. The people of the community believe in the

mandate of the foundation and give it outstanding support year after year.

I would like to recognize the contribution of the foundation and of the community which supports it for the good work which they have done over the past 20 years, and I hope it continues into the future.

Thank you.

#### Excellence in Teaching

**Mr. Hancock:** Mr. Speaker, it's an honour and a privilege to rise today to speak about excellence in teaching. Alberta has an outstanding education system. Whether it is the dean of medicine at Harvard or each of us here or so many Albertans serving our communities as doctors and nurses, technologists and technicians, professionals, entrepreneurs and businesspeople, volunteers, or NGOs, all of us are able to give our best because we learned to read, because we got an education, because we went through the education system.

But the system, Mr. Speaker, is nothing without teachers. Each of us has a memory of a teacher who inspired us. Each of us knows that at the core of anything good are good people: dedicated, passionate, and committed. Those talented people in education, those teachers inspired us to think, to sing, to write poetry. Our history includes teachers like my mother, who went out to teach 12 grades in a one-room schoolhouse, or teachers like yourself, Mr. Speaker, who took his team of students from Barrhead to win the national finals in *Reach for the Top*.

Teachers play a significant role in our lives. It is only appropriate that we encourage excellence in teaching, and it is only appropriate that we recognize excellence in teaching. This past week the finalists for the 2006 excellence in teaching awards were announced: 134 finalists from across the province representing many, many more who were nominated by parents, colleagues, and students. I cannot read all of the names of the finalists at this time, so I will table a list at the appropriate time.

But I know you will forgive me for singling out one of the 134 of whom I'm very, very proud. Carrying on the tradition of excellence of his great-grandfather as a teacher, his grandmother and my mother as a teacher, and his mother and my wife as a teacher and junior high school principal, my son, Ian Hancock, who teaches at Sandhills elementary school in La Crête, Alberta, in the riding of the Member for Peace River, was one of those 134 finalists, those 134 excellent teachers who represent the excellence we have in teaching and the hopes that we have for the future of our learning society.

I know each of you will want to join me in congratulating all 134 of the 2006 excellence in teaching award finalists.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

#### Industrial Development

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Smart growth or a free-for-all in Alberta? Albertans appreciate the tremendous contribution made by oil and gas activity in the province. Too often resource companies are being pitted against local citizens, landowners, and environment advocates. The conflict, though, is not ideological. We all need the benefit from the resource industries. The problem is also not primarily with the regulatory bodies: the Energy and Utilities Board and the Natural Resources Conservation Board. The problem is with the lack of leadership in this province expressed in clear legislation and enforced by capable and sufficient manpower.

Albertans want governance that uses good science and public values to guide the scope and pace of growth in the province: smart growth rather than a free-for-all. Again and again Albertans have

been frustrated by the lack of leadership despite reassurance and rhetoric. What is the vision and plan for our lands and water? What rate of development and scope of environmental impact at the watershed level is sustainable? Who decides at the local level for development that is consistent with the region's priorities? What revenue return to the province on resource extraction is fair?

This government has failed to deliver the three most fundamental elements of governance: first, a vision grounded in a legislated land-use framework that balances sustainable economic, environmental, and social values. Two, the government has failed to deliver scientific assessment of the present and projected impacts of development on air, water, and land. Witness the absence of baseline water testing before coal-bed methane drilling and fracturing.

Number three: the government has failed to deliver a process for meaningful public involvement in the key development decisions affecting people's lives and land. The government of Alberta's role is to set the course for development, balancing between public and private interests, short-term benefit, and long-term sustainability for our children's grandchildren. It's time to challenge the Alberta advantage, which without a plan, without science, and without meaningful public consultation fosters a free-for-all for resource extraction at the expense of the environment, community cohesion, and our future.

I used to think that the oil industry ran the province. I was wrong. No one is in charge. The lack of governance is negligence, and negligence is either incompetence or corruption. Albertans will decide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

#### City of Lloydminster

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I would beg to differ.

Recently the Canadian publication *MoneySense* magazine released results on the best place to live in Canada. *MoneySense* pulled data from 108 communities of more than 10,000 people and crunched the numbers to figure out which communities across the country actually do have the best combination of natural advantage and economic good fortune. They focused entirely what they could measure: weather, how many people can walk to work, population growth, household income, unemployment, economic diversity, house prices, and unique community features. The result, no surprise to me, number three on the list and notably in the Vermilion-Lloydminster constituency is the beautiful city of Lloydminster.

The city of Lloydminster has many features that cannot be measured so easily: Lakeland College, including the Vic Juba theatre, the new Common Wealth Credit Union centre, the Lloydminster Exhibition Association, and many many more.

Mr. Speaker, Husky Oil has had a long and successful relationship with Lloydminster, and their recently announced expansion of the upgrader as well as the soon-to-open ethanol plant are just more good news for this area.

Business icons like Ray Nelson, like the late John Page and the late Bob Jack Sr. set the bar very high for community involvement. That torch has been lifted and held by people like Cliff Rose, the Musgrave family, Ken Kay at Agland, Wayne King at Grithog, and the Rusway group, all of them donating tremendous time and financial resources to the many community projects.

Mr. Speaker, led by the incomparable Vic Juba, a host of volunteers also contribute daily to make Lloydminster truly a great city to

live near and be from. No community gives more of their time and effort than these.

To Mayor Ken Baker, city council, and all the people in the wonderful city of Lloydminster and surrounding communities, congratulations on being recognized for something we've known for a long time: the city of Lloydminster is truly a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

#### Southwestern Alberta Attractions

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a rich history and a vibrant heritage. The Cardston-Taber-Warner constituency is no exception. The southwest corner of this fine province is full of interesting destinations for our local tourists and international travelers alike.

The Milk River winds sweep through the hoodoos in Writing-on-Stone provincial park, which contains rare pictographs depicting an earlier Alberta civilization, while Warner's Devil's Coulee Dinosaur Heritage Museum and egg site are a footprint of an even earlier time.

The town of Taber celebrates its famous sweet corn with its annual Cornfest and hosts a successful farmer's market with wonderful local produce during the summer months.

Over in Glenwood visitors can enjoy a treat from the historic ice cream parlour and the Cheese Factory Museum. In nearby Hill Spring you can kick up your heels at the Great Canadian Barn Dance, complete with chuckwagon grub and live entertainment.

Raymond is home to Alberta's original stampede and still hosts cowboys and cowgirls on July 1. Motocross riders can also catch some air time at the local motocross track.

The Garden City of Magrath offers a look at agricultural technology development with the Galt irrigation canal and the buffalo sloped grain elevators.

The Stirling Agricultural Village is a national historic site depicting an original 'rurban' layout that is also home to the Galt Historic Railway Park.

Cardston's Remington Carriage Museum is one of Canada's best indoor attractions, displaying over 225 fully restored horse-drawn carriages. The museum has also gained notoriety in *The Simpsons* sitcom. Tourists are welcome at the visitors' centre of the Cardston Temple, another Canadian historic site.

Another gem of the south is Waterton Lakes international peace park, home of the famous Prince of Wales Hotel. Waterton park is a UNESCO world heritage site, just a short drive from Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, also a UNESCO site.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite all Albertans, members of this House, and tourists from around the world to visit some of the many wonderful attractions in southwestern Alberta.

head: 2:50

#### Presenting Petitions

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from 206 Albertans urging the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms, which will undermine public medicare.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** I think I pretty much have everybody in the Official Opposition having a petition. Is this correct?

Well, we'll go, then, with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, then to the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, and then we'll go to the front row.

Okay, hon. member.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition from 202 citizens who urge the government to abandon its plan for third-way health care reforms, which undermine public medicare.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. As the past chair of the organization Friends of Medicare it gives me great pleasure to table 205 signatures that the organization collected.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two petitions. One hundred and ten signatures from Edmonton, Calgary, Spruce Grove, and various other places, all from concerned citizens urging the government not to proceed with expansion of private, for-profit hospitals, opposing any action to contravene the Canada Health Act, and voting against forcing Albertans to pay for private health insurance.

The second petition is the same from an additional 208 persons, and again this is essentially against the third-way proposals from the government.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling a petition from 204 concerned Albertans from throughout the province, mostly from communities including Cochrane, Sherwood Park, Edmonton, Calgary, Whitecourt, and Vegreville. It calls on us to defeat any plans to go ahead with the third-way reforms, to defeat legislation that would allow the expansion of private, for-profit hospitals, to oppose any action that would contravene the Canada Health Act, and to vote against plans that would force Albertans to pay for private health insurance.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table a petition with 108 names from the Calgary and Edmonton areas calling on the government of Alberta to increase funding "in order that all Alberta Works income support benefits may be increased."

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

**Mr. Mitzel:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with 228 names on it from the Alexandra junior high school, urging the government to address the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta.

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

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, I have four tablings. I'm tabling the annual reports for 2005 for the Automobile Insurance Rate Board, for the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, for the Credit Union Deposit Guarantee Corporation.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table Finance's contract policy as I indicated I would do.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got one tabling. It's five copies of a report released today by the Friends of Medicare. The report shows that Albertans oppose the government's so-called third-way proposals by a margin of 2 to 1.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table here this afternoon. The first one is from William Thomas of St. Albert. Mr. Thomas is a senior who believes that the third way is a money grab for doctors and insurance companies.

I also have a letter from Carolyn Campbell, who's expressing her strong opposition to the third way. She notes that Peace Country health chair Marv Moore has publicly opposed the third way because it will worsen physician shortages in rural Alberta.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling today is an e-mail from an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Ms Donna Thompson. She asks why our schools need to rely on fundraising so much when Alberta is as rich as it is today. Her children's school's latest newsletter delivered the bad news that they can no longer afford a full-time librarian due to budget constraints.

My second tabling today is from Ms Janna Stirling Gilchrist, urging me to do everything in my power to prevent the privatization of health care. She states that as a taxpayer she is satisfied that her tax dollars go into supporting the public system and ensuring access for all people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the document I quoted from in question period, the judgment of Hon. Justice McIntyre in the case where the accused was given a 3 to 1 credit for his time in a remand centre.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in my member's statement today, I wish to table the requisite copies of a news release from Alberta Education which attaches as a backgrounder the names of the 134 finalists for the 2006 excellence in teaching awards.

As well, the requisite copies of an ad that was placed in the *Edmonton Journal* on Friday, April 7, which has some commentary which is important to the process and, again, lists the names of those 2006 finalists for the excellence in teaching awards.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of tablings from concerned Albertans today. First is from Pat Boehm, who notes that "prior cuts to the public health system have been damaging."

Next, from Desiree Bauer, who notes that "women have the most to lose under the Third Way."

From Diana Bacon, who states that "waiting lists of those unable to pay for private service will be longer, not shorter" under the third way.

From Scott Babcock, who notes that with almost a million people in Calgary, why are there only three adult hospitals, that they are the only major metropolitan city without an inner-city hospital, and how that relates to the third way.

From Anne and Dale Rowat, expressing opposition to the third way, believing it introduces the greed factor into the practice of medicine.

From Paul Ammann, who opposes the idea of payment for certain procedures.

From Bill Alton, noting that if there's a private system, it should stand completely alone, and quite a bit of detail on how he sees that happening.

From Allison Akgungor, with a number of responses to the health framework but ending with: "health care must seek to benefit its patients first."

From A. Paziuk, who asks for more family doctors, centralizing record systems, and they advocate creating private labs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

### Speaker's Ruling

#### Members' Statements

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, it seems that the chair violated Standing Order 7(4), which allows for the recognition of six members to participate in Members' Statements. Today I called on seven members to participate in Members' Statements. What I find so startling about this is that everybody was prepared. I don't know who we can eliminate, but let's just say that in the spirit of this time of the year we had seven today, and they were all very well done. We'll try and abide by the rules with greater certainty into the future.

The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation on a point of order.

### Point of Order

#### Imputing Motives

**Mr. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising under Standing Order 23, probably (i) and (l). It reads:

A member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member . . .

(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another member . . .

(l) introduces any matter in debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly.

I would assume that that means that one would understand what they're talking about before they would make comments.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this evolves around the whole issue about the remaining lands, the lands that would not be needed for the ring road, and how those lands would be dealt with in this agreement. Anyone that understands contract law and these sorts of things will clearly understand that when a body like the provincial government takes possession of property and the lands that were not going to be needed for the ring road would at all times remain the property of the vendor, then in fact the lands weren't entitled to the province at any time. Clearly, under the offer to sell agreement number 6 clearly states that these lands would be going back to the vendor.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has had this agreement in his possession for some time, and if he read 6, 7, and 8, clearly it shows that what I was talking about is what was in the agreement right from day one, from the time that the offer to sell was agreed to.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate it if you could rule on it because I believe that it was terribly unfortunate that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would indicate that what we were saying and what is written in the agreement was not accurate.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Opposition House Leader.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe that there is a point of order here today. The situation that we have in hand here is that the minister under questioning yesterday referred to some documents and later tabled them. In fact, in examining the documents, which is what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was doing today and questioning based on the documents that were tabled by the minister, he found that three of them contained more or less the same offer to sell agreement, but a fourth one did not. The member was very clear and actually named off the sessional number and the identifier number in his question. That fourth document does not contain the contract specifications that the minister was responding to.

Now, it is the job of the Official Opposition to be holding the government accountable and to be asking for information from it. If I'm interpreting the minister correctly, he seems to say that if the opposition doesn't understand the issue, they shouldn't be asking the question. Well, the point of asking the question is to get information and to help everyone understand the issue.

So I would say that Standing Order 23(l) was not offended in any way, shape, or form. As a matter of fact, I note in a number of cases that *Beauchesne* 409 does state that questions should be asked about important matters which fall "within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the specific Minister to whom it is addressed." That's perfectly appropriate, and that, in fact, is what was done.

I notice later that in 409(6) it also notes that "a question must be within the administrative competence of the Government," and "the Minister to whom the question is directed is responsible to the House for his or her present Ministry and not for any decision taken in a previous portfolio." Therefore, it was perfectly appropriate that the questions were directed to the correct minister, and he was under, we hope, some obligation to attempt to answer.

As to the citation of 23(i), "Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member," I have the questions that the member was asking. I don't have the Blues, so I am unable to check against delivery, but he was asking: why was the choice made to return this particular piece of land to the individual for a particular price? I don't know how that's imputing a motive. It's asking a direct question about why the government made a decision to do something, asks again, you know, given that the government knew that this land would be surplus.

The questions that were asked by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar were all entirely appropriate, were directed towards the minister responsible, did not impugn any motives towards anyone, and they were specifically directed around the fourth document, which does not contain the clause that the minister continues to point out. It has an entirely different clause. The questions were specific to that document, and that was outlined by the member as part of his question.

I'm looking at the documents again, and indeed, yes, there is a section 6 that appears to be identical in three of them but is most definitely not the same in the fourth document, and the questions were around the fourth document.

So there is no point of order here either under 23(i) or 23(l). Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there other members who would like to participate?

Hon. members, the chair has listened very attentively to the questions and the answers in the last number of days and, first of all, appreciates that there was a temperate emotion attached to the questions and the responses by both members participating.

I would, however, like to draw all members' attention to *Beauchesne* 494. Essentially, the subject heading is Acceptance of the Word of a Member, and I quote from *Beauchesne* 494.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly with their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

It would strike the chair that there may be some dispute among the two participants with respect to the facts, and that is part of the parliamentary tradition and the democratic tradition, that, in essence, hon. members may look at the same thing and somehow see two different things. Our job, of course, over time is to try and find the one thing that's common to all.

Thank you very much for the interjections. We'll now move on.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

#### **Advanced Education**

**The Deputy Chair:** As per our Standing Orders the first hour will be allocated between the minister and members of the opposition, following which any other member may participate.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

3:10

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure to move the Ministry of Advanced Education's business plan for 2006-2009 and our budget estimates for 2006-07.

I would like to take a moment to introduce the people from the department who are in attendance today. Dr. Bill Byrne is my deputy minister. Please stand. Thank you. Phil Gougeon, assistant deputy minister of adult learning; Mark Douglas, acting assistant deputy minister of apprenticeship and industry training; Rai Batra, assistant deputy minister, strategic corporate services; Gerry Waisman, executive director, learner assistance; Blake Bartlett, executive director, financial services; Bill Spaans, director, planning and measurement; and Michael Shields, communications director for the ministry. I can't really tell if there's anyone else up there that I might have missed, but certainly two people from my office that need to be mentioned are Fran Cuglietta, who's looked after keeping me on the straight and narrow for five years at the SPC, and Jack Janssen, who is providing some valuable services in transition. So these are the people that make it happen.

You know, it's sort of like where the rubber meets the road. We who are elected deal with the big picture. We debate policies, and these professionals make it all happen, so I intend to let them do their job and to hopefully unleash their passion and their creativity to try new things and to celebrate their successes.

My staff will be listening very intently to your every word and reviewing *Hansard* to provide all of the answers to the questions that I may not get to. They are the experts, after all. All I ask of you, hon. members, is that you tell me which page and which line item your question relates to to make their job a little bit easier.

I have some brief opening remarks, and then I will take questions from the committee, but I will share some of my biases and ideas with you as I go along.

There's no doubt that postsecondary learning is a key priority to Albertans, and we need to get on with the job. I want to clear something up right up front because there have been a number of daily and weekly scrums and maybe even some people in this Legislature who have been talking about things like they don't expect much to happen in the next year, you know, lame-duck government, all this sort of stuff. Well, let me say this. Please don't underestimate the resolve and the passion of the people on this side of the House for good government. Please do not underestimate the resolve and the ability of our departments to get the job done. We are open for business, and I know that we shouldn't underestimate the ability of members of the opposition to keep our feet to the fire.

Alberta's future prosperity is a knowledge-based and global economy, and our future quality of life will depend upon having the skills, knowledge, abilities, and creativity to succeed. This is a province that is faced with depleting natural resources, and we're just beginning to catch up with respect to advanced education because the growth has been so phenomenal. But what better way to turn a nonrenewable resource into a renewable one than to invest in advanced education that turns into better jobs for Albertans and, as a result, grows the tax base year after year? Now, that's what I call a renewable resource worth investing in, a gift that keeps on giving and giving, not to mention improving the standard of living and the quality of life for Albertans.

This government's vision for Advanced Education embodies this and more. It's a vision that uses a wide lens in thinking about advanced education, and I have to say that governments do not have a monopoly on good ideas. I intend to be open to good ideas regardless of which side of the House they may come from.

It's a vision that includes the full spectrum of learning. When you talk about advanced education, it's not just about, you know, universities, colleges, technical institutes. It's a full spectrum of learning from literacy, apprenticeship, immigrant programs, second-language programs, distance education, e-learning in addition to the more traditional programs offered through our colleges and universities. From public institutions to private, not-for-profit institutions and private vocational schools, from Alberta College of Art and Design to Zeneba Academy of Esthetics, we have it all, from A to Z. So when we talk about creating more access – call it what you will: seats, positions, spaces, or learning opportunities – we are talking about the whole spectrum of what we do from literacy to postdoc.

It's a vision of a province where education is a valued and central aspect of life from birth right through to death. That's why, Mr. Chairman, we have conceived and, in fact, created a plan called ACES, the Alberta centennial education savings plan, that essentially encourages every parent to invest in the future learning of their children. I find it quite interesting, though, that there was more interest with the \$400 cheque than there seems to have been with the \$800 cheque. We're going to be looking into why that is and improve the results because only about 5,700 children, I think, have been registered in that program.

So this is a province where Albertans, regardless of where they live, have access to learning opportunities, and they have these opportunities in many different forms. I think of the potential of SuperNet, for example, where education is delivered remotely. I think of all of the different applications that we're just starting to see emerge in learning, advanced ed, and health, and so on. This is a real opportunity, and I think that we need to take advantage of it and we need to celebrate the successes and distribute the ideas around the province so that people can learn from each other.

It's a province where education is understood to be a central component of every community and the most fundamental foundation of all for the future. It's a vision of a full and seamless continuum of educational opportunities. Those opportunities are available to all regardless of where they live or at what stage of life they are or their lot in life. The best way to break the poverty cycle is to educate the next generation from early intervention right on through to postgraduate degrees. It's a province where everyone in every corner is able to move through each step in his or her educational pursuit easily and efficiently. If we've got regulations or processes that get in the way, we will find ways to get them out of the way. We want Albertans to be inspired to reach their full potential through advanced learning, to move beyond where they are and where they can be.

So I want to work with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Human Resources and Employment and the Minister of Children's Services and the Minister of Health and the Minister of Innovation too, of course. I want to work with them to turn our kids on earlier in life. So much of what happens in postsecondary starts earlier in life, and I need to share with you a belief that I have with respect to these particular points because I happen to have had an experience 50 years ago, when I was in grade 6.

3:20

**An Hon. Member:** It's not possible.

**Mr. Herard:** Absolutely – 50 years ago. You know, it makes you think, doesn't it?

I was in a little country school in Beaumont. In fact, I think we had grade 1 to 12 in four rooms or five rooms or something like that. The principal there was, you know, our math teacher. He was our guidance counsellor. He was the principal. He was the hockey coach. He did all those things. One day I decided to ask him: how do you determine what you should be in the future? He said, "Denis, the word 'vocation' comes from the Latin word 'vocare,' which is a voice from within."

I really think, Mr. Chairman, that maybe we've forgotten that. I think he was right. Fifty years ago he had it right. That's why I want to work with all of these other ministers to see if there aren't ways that we can in fact tune in to the voice from within our children. Once you've tuned into it, then fan the flame because a turned-on child does so much better than one that isn't. I think that there are some direct implications with respect to that and advanced learning because these kinds of things speak to values and attitudes.

I want to share with you some information with respect to other things that are involved in all of this, initiatives such as character education, which I'm pleased to say now is part of the citizenship curriculum. You might be interested to know that, you know, the former Minister of Advanced Education has done an awful lot of heavy lifting. Thank God, because it's making my job so much easier. You might be interested to know that the former minister's wife, Janet, first introduced me to character education, which she implemented at Harry Ainlay high school. I went over there to have a look. I saw it in action, was sold on it, worked with the ASBA committee to get it into the curriculum, then got three boards to present at the SPC and magically pass the motion to make it province-wide.

I think those kinds of initiatives speak to the values and attitudes that we have to have to succeed in postsecondary education because when you think about life-long learning, you have to think about independent life-long learning. The word "independent" speaks to having taken ownership of one's own learning. To take ownership means that you must have the right values and attitudes to make it happen. So I think that these are extremely important kinds of

initiatives to make the transition into postsecondary better and make postsecondary more of a success.

Another aspect of this is applying those values and attitudes to modelling work ethic because when you talk to an employer and you ask him how come your kids lose their first jobs, it's not because they can't read, and it's not because they can't write, count, or communicate; it's because many generally don't have work ethic. They don't show up on time. They don't care about the quality of work that they do. They don't care how many tools they break, how much material they wreck. You know, things like work ethic are so important. Those are the kinds of things that I want to work together with my colleagues to move forward.

The business plan I'm presenting today outlines the decisive and clear actions that our government will take and is taking on the postsecondary front to achieve our vision. The business plan highlights several priorities for Advanced Education. The A Learning Alberta review we undertook last fall involved thousands of Albertans in designing a policy framework to guide the strategic direction of advanced learning for our province. It's my expectation that this policy framework will be released soon. I want to say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that ever since he talked about the black holes yesterday, I've been looking for them. I can tell you that I haven't found any, and I don't think I will.

One specific outcome of the review will be a new tuition and affordability framework for postsecondary education. Yes, that framework will include a new tuition policy, but it will also include measures that address all of the costs that students face in going to school: the cost of books, the cost of living, the cost of relocating from rural areas and small centres. Tuition, of course, is only part of the cost that students face.

One thing that I'm convinced of: it shouldn't be cheaper for a student to go overseas than to study where they were born. That's something that we really need to look at. But at the same time there is a shared responsibility for education on kids and partnerships that involves all of our society: parents, students, government, and employers, who profit from a well-educated workforce. In the end I think that advanced education is probably the best bargain on the planet.

We will also continue with our implementation strategy for the Access to the Future Act, our government's flagship legislation last year. This legislation provided the framework for investing in endowment funds for postsecondary education as it outlined our government's commitment to affordable, accessible, and high-quality postsecondary education. Again, so much of that we owe to my predecessor.

This year emphasis will be placed on the needs of the diversity of communities, cultures, and traditions and their A Learning aspirations and abilities within the province. As an example, collaboration with stakeholders to improve First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learner success will be a priority. Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure that we really have done a very good job of listening to the voices from within of our First Nation and Métis and Inuit communities. Maybe we need to learn to listen closer to their aspirations and then fan the flame.

There will also be a focus on expanding regional and community access through the expansion of a degree-granting capacity within the system, and I can say that there's a lot happening on that front.

We will leverage technology to better meet the needs of learners. As an example, we will continue to work with our postsecondary institutions . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, we only have about three seconds left. It would really help the committee if you would move the estimates that you're presenting.

**Mr. Herard:** I did move them in my very first statement, sir.

**The Deputy Chair:** You did?

**Mr. Herard:** Yes. But I'll do it again if you'd like.

**The Deputy Chair:** Okay. The table officers didn't hear that part. We will consider that you have moved.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

3:30

**Mr. Taylor:** Mr. Chairman, I heard the hon. minister move the estimates at the beginning of his presentation, so I can vouch for that.

Much to talk about. Much to talk about. Hard to know where to begin. Of course, much of what we are talking about we were talking about here a year ago, so I'm presented with the situation of having a brand new minister and many of the same old problems that we were talking about here a year ago. Some progress has been made. Some progress has been made through the Learning Alberta framework, which I was honoured to take part in at the invitation of the previous minister, and I thank the previous minister for that. The progress, though, seems to have happened in fits and starts. I know that the Learning Alberta process was all-encompassing, and I wouldn't expect that everything would be solved overnight anymore than I would expect Rome to be built in a day, but we do have some problems that need to be addressed and need to be addressed in a timely – dare I say urgent? – fashion.

The postsecondary system that we have in the province of Alberta is not accessible enough, it is not affordable enough, and by so many standards of measurement it is not nearly excellent enough. Now, far be it from me to suggest that the system is bereft of excellence. The previous minister, I, and all people present in this House today know that there are many pockets of excellence in the system, driven by very, very committed men and women who strive for excellence, strive for greatness. Thank God for those people because if it weren't for them, I fear that this whole system would be mired in mediocrity. There's too much mediocrity in the system as it is.

The current minister referred a number of times in a number of ways to awakening the voice within, hearing the voice within. I think another way of expressing that is: creating the conditions to awaken the passion within each person for their calling, the thing that they were perhaps meant to do, destined to do, if you believe in that, and then to fan those flames to encourage that, starting at as young an age as possible so that the fire is burning strong by the time they get to the postsecondary level. But, you know, sometimes those fires can have water poured all over them by an unresponsive, inflexible system, and that problem, as the minister knows, exists in this province today.

The issues are these in a nutshell. The lack of a tuition policy. I heard that the new affordability policy and the new tuition policy which will be part of that are coming soon. I would urge the new minister to attach a date to that. I was after his predecessor for an entire year to try and get a date to that; I don't have one yet. My latest understanding is that it will be sometime next month. I'd like to know precisely when. You know, you've been working on this one long enough now, and you've got a whole army of helpers up there in the gallery. You've been working on this one long enough by now that I think you should be able to give me a date, and I would urge you to do that. That's one issue.

Another issue, which should be covered in the affordability policy as well, is the ever-increasing debt burden on students. The minister made reference to great education as still being the single factor that

is best capable of lifting someone out of poverty. But if we're going to price it in such a way and assist those taking part in it in such a way that they're going to come out the other end with a debt equivalent to a small mortgage, that's one heck of an anchor to tie around their necks at the age of 21, 22, 25. That prevents them from fully participating in society as a fully productive member of the province of Alberta once they graduate. They hold off on buying houses, they hold off on starting families, they hold off on creating the next generation of Albertans, they hold off on reaching their full potential because they've got great big, fat student loan debt to pay off, payments to make every month.

Other issues. The lack of space, insufficient space to accommodate the students who want a postsecondary education in this province and the lack of a published plan for expanding the system. British Columbia has such a plan, and when you publish a plan, when you've got it in writing, it helps to stick to it. Now, the minister referred to spaces or learning opportunities, and he suggested that it doesn't matter what you call them, whether you call them spaces or seats or learning opportunities or Bill or Bob or whatever. Well, it does matter. A seat in a classroom is different, maybe not necessarily better, depending on the context, depending on the circumstance, but it is different from an online learning opportunity, from a distance learning opportunity. A seat in a classroom at a university or at a lab table at a university or at a classroom at a college or at a polytechnical institute is radically different from a literacy learning opportunity. That literacy learning opportunity, granted, is absolutely essential if the person needing that opportunity is ever going to have a shot at occupying a seat in a university or college classroom.

But we have to remember as we talk about expanding literacy programs and tackling that devil and doing all kinds of other things, that we still have a space crunch, an access crunch in our institutes of higher learning, an access crunch that is more acute in Calgary. You know, a recent report by the University of Calgary indicated that the ratio of spaces in Calgary is 461 for 10,000 residents. In Edmonton it's 574. Now, I'm not saying Edmonton has too many, Mr. Minister. We fully support Edmonton getting even more, but clearly Calgary needs to catch up, and I hope the minister will look into this.

One way in which the minister could look into this – and I would urge him to give me a response to this too – is to tell me and this House a little bit about what he sees for a new undergraduate-focused university in Calgary, such as Mount Royal university. When will the minister meet with the president of Mount Royal university – or Mount Royal College, I should say; I'm getting ahead of myself – and other members of the Mount Royal College board of governors to assess their proposal?

The Campus Calgary proposal brought forward by Calgary's public postsecondary institutions in coalition goes well beyond the Premier's promise for increased access. It calls for almost 20,000 spaces – not learning opportunities, spaces, seats to put bums in in front of a desk – by the year 2010. Are those institutions wrong in their assessment of the demand? I wonder if I could have an answer to that question because if the minister or the government thinks that they are, then that's a very key piece of information for all of us to know, for this House to know, for the opposition to know, for the institutions themselves.

A published plan for expanding the system with real targets and real detail as to what's a seat, what's a learning opportunity, what's the difference, where it's going to be, when it's going to be there: that would be extremely helpful to everybody in this province.

The rationing of space is another issue, the rationing of space through two main methods: high costs, which I've referred to



already, and artificially high entrance requirements. Both in terms of the dollar amount that it costs to get into college or university in this province and the marks required coming out of grade 12, we have set those bars so high that that is how we are screening out people who absolutely, Mr. Minister, absolutely belong in postsecondary education. You know, the previous minister and I have had this conversation between ourselves and with others in various groups, and we've both heard and we've both said that the awful truth of the matter is that most of us in this House and most of the faculty members in our postsecondary institutions could not get in today with the marks that they had coming out of grade 12. That is an issue that must be addressed urgently. That needs a plan.

Widespread public perception that cost is a barrier – widespread public perception that cost is a barrier – and the government's steadfast, ongoing refusal to accept that that public perception is reality to the public and to address that by rolling back tuition. Look, it's as simple as this: if you were running a business – and I bring up this analogy because so much of the ideology behind this government's handling of postsecondary education in the province of Alberta over the course of the last 13 years comes across as a market-driven approach to a public good education. There. I'm going to use the market-driven example so you guys over there get it. Okay?

If you were running Wal-Mart and the public perception was that your prices were too high, you'd either cut your prices, or you'd go out of business. Now, the only sane response, in my opinion, to a market-driven approach to a public good like public postsecondary education is a market response. In other words, if these issues are not addressed and are not addressed quickly and are not addressed effectively, then the students and parents of this province should vote with their feet and go to college or university in another province.

### 3:40

Insufficient and inequitable base operating funding. We've been on about that now for months and years. There are inequities in the funding formulas, and there just simply isn't enough money in base operating funding for colleges, universities, polytechnical institutes to count on a reliable, sustainable, and sufficient amount of money to pay the staff, keep the roofs from falling in, keep the lights on, keep the furnaces going in the wintertime.

An aging faculty and worldwide competition for top faculty talent: that's a very, very real issue. We stand to lose an awfully high percentage of our faculty in this province over the next five to 10 years. Oh, by the way, so does everybody else. Where are we going to get the replacements from? We'd best start competing with the best in the world if we want the best in the world. That's going to take money, and that's going to take better infrastructure, and that's going to take a far deeper and more real commitment to public postsecondary education than we've seen thus far.

An underappreciation of the importance of support staff to the quality of education and research at postsecondary facilities.

A failure to capitalize on the potential of the access to the future fund by capitalizing the fund up to its maximum. I mean, the fund has a cap on it. As I've discussed in this House a number of times, I fundamentally believe that that was a wrong decision, to put a \$3 billion cap on the fund to begin with. The whole purpose of an endowment fund is to be able to continue to put money into it on an ongoing basis and, hopefully, on a regular basis and let it grow and grow and grow because the more it grows, the more income it produces to reinvest in excellence in postsecondary education. So, for instance, if the Alberta Liberal plan had been followed, with the surplus that exists this year, that access to the future fund would already have more than the \$3 billion cap in it.

Now, this government has made a promise, a commitment, an undertaking to have that fund topped up to the \$3 billion mark within three years, but you know, you're a long way – a long way – from getting there. We're at the end of year one, going into year two, and there's not even a billion dollars in there; there's \$750 million, and there's not a dime committed to it in this budget.

Oh, I know the rumours are going around, the buzz. The grapevine is buzzing like crazy: oh, we'll put more money in in the third quarter, off-budget spending. You know, that's like waiting for grandma to die and leave you her estate before you start saving for your kids' education. That's like counting on winning the lottery to do it.

Since the minister pointed out that in his ideological, philosophical world there absolutely is to continue to be a partnership here between the student and the state and private enterprise in the funding of that student's education – and I think parents are part of that mix, too, in the minister's world – then I would suggest that the minister and the Finance minister would set a very, very good example for parents in this province by setting up a regular, sustainable contribution just like you do for your RSP, where you have money coming directly out of your bank account and into your RSP every month on the 15th and the 31st. Right? Do that to the access to the future fund, and take the cap off, and let it grow because you're saving not for any one individual's particular education, although I would presume that as this fund grows, it's going to fund a lot of scholarships and bursaries.

It should, but it should do a lot of other things too. It has the potential to move mountains and make the postsecondary education system in this province the best in the world in all aspects, whether you're talking postgraduate, apprenticeship, literacy, whatever it is. The best in the world: not just a boast from the government benches but reality, truth. The best in the world if you take the cap off.

You know, the other problem that we have, the other ongoing issue that we have that we absolutely must address is the second lowest participation rate in the nation. Close to 80 per cent of jobs require some form of postsecondary education, yet only about 40 per cent nationally of high school students go on to university or college. Looking here on page 77 of the business plan under performance measure 2.c, "participation rate in post-secondary education – Albertans aged 18-34," I see that the actual for last year was 19 per cent. Let's round it up to 20. Eighty per cent of the jobs require postsecondary education, and 20 per cent of our students are getting it. Mr. Chairman, that's a huge problem. The projection is that by 2008-2009 we'll try to squeeze that up to 23 per cent. Well, you know, you haven't set the bar high enough. You need to do more.

This is important. This is very important. This is very important to a number of people who are already declared candidates in the race to replace your current leader. This is important to them because they know that it's important to the people of Alberta. They know that it's important to the mothers and fathers of Alberta. They know that it's important to the students of Alberta, students of any age. They know that it's important to the adult learners and the lifelong learners in this province and to future generations. This is our ticket out of dependence on a nonrenewable resource into a renewable resource economy, where that resource is knowledge. That knowledge can bring us unimaginable possibilities. For one example, we could lead the world in alternative energy technologies driven by the money that our nonrenewable resources produce and the knowledge that we can grow from an excellent postsecondary education system.

I mean, that's just one example off the top of my head. It could be any one of a number of things. Dream. Dream big. We live in a province, perhaps the only jurisdiction anywhere on this planet,

that actually has the potential right here, right now to make it happen. But you've got to take the chains off. You've got to start thinking differently. You've got to start thinking imaginatively and innovatively and creatively. I'm not sure that I see it in here. I see some baby steps – and that's good – but we need to move quickly, more quickly than we have been.

There are a number of things that have become mired down. I don't know whether it's departmental bureaucracy or whether it's a cabinet and/or caucus that hasn't been all that open to some of the ideas that have been expressed over the last year or what it is, but things aren't moving along quickly enough. An innovative guy like Harvey Weingarten, the president of the University of Calgary, who wants to innovate, who sees, for instance, the digital library as a keystone, a cornerstone of that innovation, has plans to spend \$710 million on innovative capital projects for the U of C and can't get but, I think, \$156 million from us, something like that, so he's got to consider borrowing the rest. Dr. Weingarten is just one example.

I've been talking to a number of stakeholders. They see the possibility of some innovation with this new minister. I hope you're up for it.

Thank you.

3:50

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Herard:** Well, thank you very much. I think that the Member for Calgary-Currie is a good example of how astute my constituents are.

**Mr. Taylor:** Why do you think I live around the corner from you?

**Mr. Herard:** Exactly.

I do agree with a lot of the things that the hon. member says. I would say that there's no question that we're going to do much better working together on this than working agin each other, for sure.

With respect to the debt burden, I agree that that needs to be looked at as well. Now, if I gave you a date of releasing that report, I'm sure that some people would say that I'm giving you an unfair advantage because you're my constituent. The truth of the matter is that I don't know what the date is. If I did, then I would consider, of course, giving it to you. The fact of the matter is that the reports are being compiled as we speak. I'm told it's weeks, not months – weeks – and that's about the best that I can do.

With respect to Mount Royal College, I have met, of course, with their president on a number of occasions, and we've talked about many, many different ways of achieving what they're trying to achieve. I think he's doing the right thing right now. You know, you can't just go poof, and you're a university. There are so many things that need to add up with respect to quality, with respect to the library, with respect to all of the infrastructure that's required, not only that but the credentials of the instructors, and so on and so forth. They are doing the right thing, and once they've sort of jumped that particular hurdle, then I think that we can look at this and be able to talk about this a lot more. But first let them jump that hurdle.

I agree with the hon. member that what is probably a really traumatic experience is if someone has worked their buns off through high school only to find themselves 2 percentage points below where they need to be to get in. I agree with the hon. member that that is a very destructive kind of experience for somebody. I think that we do need to look at giving them different kinds of access. If they can't get into this particular program, at least don't

turn them away from postsecondary. Let's see if we can find ways of providing access in a different way.

[Mr. Johnston in the chair]

You know, at the beginning of the year you've got all these students that are coming into our universities, colleges, and technical institutes. Some that are, in fact, in the system already, repeating courses, are essentially blocking access to some of these kids coming in. How much of that is there? I've asked the students' union that question, and they tell me that there's really no information system to provide that. I'd like to know how much. I know that both my kids had problems in their first year. That's why I was talking about independent, lifelong learners. They need to have the values and attitudes to in fact have the right mental and spiritual tools to get the job done. So there are many different kinds of access barriers, and certainly the high bar of the marks is one of them.

With respect to the perception of the high cost of postsecondary, the hon. member asked me what I would do if I was running Wal-Mart. If it's a perception problem, I would probably use the tools of his former profession. You know, I probably might use QR 77 and do a lot of advertising or something. If it's a perception, then you need to communicate. If it's a reality, then it's a different action.

Now, with respect to the access to the future fund, the member is quite correct with respect to the total that's in there now. Of course, this is the first year that we're going to have some income to disburse, about \$45 million out of that particular fund. Our Premier has committed that the fund will be \$3 billion within two years, and I think he's got a good record of keeping his promises.

We will be working collaboratively with Human Resources and Employment to address the critical skill shortages resulting from the strong economic growth in this province. In this regard we will be co-leading the initiative of building and educating tomorrow's workforce with Human Resources and Employment. This initiative has been designated a top provincial priority by our government. We intend to enhance Alberta's people capability by better informing, attracting, developing, and retaining skilled workers and also by providing Albertans access to affordable and high-quality educational opportunities. It's about both training and education.

So these are some of the key strategies in the next business plan cycle.

I would now like to outline for you the investments that our government has planned to make to allow us to realize our vision of Alberta becoming a true learning society. Inevitably we have to talk about dollars. I've met with my communications professionals to talk, first, about the benefits that the dollars are buying and not so much about the dollars initially because Albertans don't relate to whether or not we're spending \$50 million here. You know: is that the right amount? Is it too much? Is it too little? That doesn't really tell them very much. So one thing that I will try and do is make sure that we communicate the benefits that the investments are producing rather than simply the investment because it really doesn't mean too much to them.

This year our government has once again made advanced education a top priority. The proposed 2006-07 budget for the Ministry of Advanced Education is a record 19 per cent increase over last year, the largest single-year increase in advanced education spending in Alberta. The total investment in advanced education will reach \$2.2 billion in 2006-07. This increased funding shows that our government is committed to achieving our vision. Is advanced education a priority? You bet it is. Is it fast enough to satisfy my neighbour? I'm not so sure that it is. Our focus on increasing access to postsecondary programs, making postsecondary

education affordable, and increasing the quality of the system will continue beyond 2006-07. Total spending on advanced education will grow to \$2.5 billion by 2008-09.

Those are inputs, and they're investments, but that's only one aspect. We need to find ways to improve productivity as well. We can't keep stretching the rubber band. You know, we've got a pretty good track record of doing that to ourselves in this government when you talk about double-digit increases to doctors, nurses, teachers, and so on at the same time as you lose productivity on the other side. You've got a rubber band in the middle, and you can't keep stretching it because that leads to unsustainability.

One of the things we need to do is see if there are ways of being more efficient. Our budget for 2006-07 includes \$1.4 billion to support the operations of postsecondary institutions. These operating grants will increase by 6 per cent each year for the next three years. Now, that should allow our institutions to make important strides in their plans to improve learning outcomes and to catch up on some things that maybe they've had difficulty doing over the last few years.

It also includes \$273 million for capital grants to postsecondary institutions that will be used to support new and ongoing capital projects. Over the next three years over \$1.1 billion will be spent on postsecondary facilities. We just heard from the hon. member that it looks like Calgary alone could use almost all of that. These funds will enable construction, expansion, and upgrades for various facilities, including the University of Alberta centennial centre for interdisciplinary sciences, phase 2 of the Calgary Bow Valley College expansion, the University of Calgary's digital library, which is part of the Alberta-wide Lois Hole Campus Alberta digital library initiative, and capital projects at Grant MacEwan College, Red Deer College, the University of Lethbridge, Lakeland College, and others.

4:00

You know, right now the cost of construction is going up about 1 and a half per cent per month, and some people say even more than that. That's 18 per cent a year. Return on investment income is about 6 or 7 per cent. So what is the cost of waiting? We need to study that, and we need to make decisions with respect to that for all Albertans. As I said before, what better investment than investing in the people of Alberta?

Capital funding is crucial for improving postsecondary access, so is funding more spaces. In support of this, \$183 million is budgeted under the enrolment-planning envelope in 2006-07. This represents an increase of \$61 million, or 50 per cent, over the last year's funding. We had planned to spend around \$30 million with respect to that, but we were able to double it to \$60 million, which is nice. We announced last month that this additional funding will add 2,400 new spaces into the system plus 880 spaces for new degree programs at Grant MacEwan College. Of course, Mount Royal is moving down the road to getting into degree-granting as well. As the programs become fully enrolled in the years ahead, this number of new spaces will reach over 7,000 in total. These funds plus allocations made over the next three years will result in 11,800 new student spaces, which is what the hon. member across the way wants to call them, by 2008-09.

I said before that we need to look at the fact that Advanced Education deals from literacy to postdoctoral work. You know, access to learning opportunities encompasses the entire gamut of the services that are being provided by this department. This is a key part of our efforts, to add 15,000 new learning opportunities into the advanced learning system between 2005 and '08. Yes, most of these opportunities will be actual classroom seats within universities, colleges, and technical institutes, but they will also be in community

programs like literacy, immigrant bridging, English as a Second Language, and so on.

Ensuring that postsecondary education is affordable continues to be a high priority in this budget, and this budget clearly signals our intent to make postsecondary education affordable for all Albertans. We recognize that the cost of postsecondary education is a shared responsibility among students, families, government, and the employment community.

The hon. member talked about, you know, conservative kinds of policies. Well, one of the things that conservatives like to do is say that we're out of the business of being in business. You look at that and say: who benefits the most from the subsidy that is provided to our kids to go to university? So I think that maybe the employment community needs to be more involved, and I think that they are getting more involved. There are a lot of great examples of partnerships where they're stepping up to the plate and participating.

Our government has committed to a second consecutive year to absorb tuition increases for the 2006-07 academic year. What does that do? That leaves more dollars in our students' jeans. This applies to public postsecondary institutions as well as approved programs offered by private, not-for-profit institutions. The tuition support will be built into institutions' ongoing funding so that students won't face a dramatic increase in tuition in September 2007, the so-called triple whammy. Institutions won't lose funding. In fact, this means that when our tuition policy is introduced, it will start from 2004 tuition rates. So we have heard our student unions and our student associations in this regard.

In addition to tuition support, we have budgeted for potential enhancements to our student finance program that are expected to come out of the A Learning Alberta review. The improvements will be the ones that students have told us are important to them, but I don't expect any dancing in the streets.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

In terms of ensuring the quality of postsecondary education, one of the key initiatives is the new access to the future fund. This year, for the first time, as I said earlier, the budget includes \$45 million to enhance the capability of the postsecondary system through matching grants and the support initiatives that broaden access and improve quality, enhance learning outcomes, attract and retain the best faculty available, and expand innovation capacity. Again, thank you to my predecessor and to the staff who have worked so hard to work out this great plan.

Since the fund was created as part of the Access to the Future Act, my ministry has received a tremendous response from individuals and organizations that have come forward to invest in our postsecondary system. These include the Schulich foundation, \$25 million to the U of C to fund a chair and scholarships for engineering students; the MacPhail donation, \$10 million to SAIT for a trades and technology complex; Bill and Mary Jo Robbins, \$5 million to Grant MacEwan; and it goes on and on.

Keeping the momentum of the fund and demonstrating high donor interest is a key component to the long-term success of the fund. Of course, as I said before, I expect the endowment to be fully funded at \$3 billion within two years. What better way to give back to society than to endow our universities, technical schools, and colleges? You know, I'm told that there's about \$3 trillion that is going to change hands from one generation to another over the next 10 years. What better way to make a difference than to endow postsecondary education?

At this point I'd like to give you an overview of the amounts to be voted for Advanced Education and highlight the changes from our

2005-06 forecast. This information starts on page 33 of the 2006-07 government estimates book. As noted on page 33, the 2006-07 estimates for expense and equipment and inventory purchases is \$2,068,035,000. Those are big numbers. The 2006 estimate for nonbudgetary disbursements is \$103,900,000.

Page 35 provides the details behind the figures on page 33. Ministry support services shows a decrease from \$20,479,000 in 2005-06 to \$20,109,000 in 2006-07. The decrease of \$370,000, or 2 per cent, results from projected reductions in supplies and services purchases.

Program delivery support shows an increase of \$1,947,000, or 5.1 per cent, from the 2005-06 forecasts. This increase results primarily from a 6 per cent grant rate increase provided to the various organizations that provide community education programs such as literacy; English as a Second Language, ESL; and inmate education programs.

Assistance to postsecondary institutions shows an increase of \$166,287,000 from the 2005-06 forecast. This increase is made up of \$61 million for the 6 per cent grant increase to postsecondary institutions, a \$60 million increase to expand enrolment spaces, and \$44 million to cover the tuition fee increases for 2006-07, and there's 44 big ones in the jeans of our students.

Postsecondary facilities infrastructure shows an increase of \$88,143,000 from the 2005-06 forecast.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

4:10

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and make a few observations on the 2006-2007 budget for Advanced Education and perhaps raise a few questions that the minister I hope will be able to address either here on the floor of the House or in some other way.

Before I get to the budget itself, let me again extend my best wishes to the Minister of Advanced Education, newly appointed, because his task is quite formidable. It's one of the most important ministries with very long-term strategic significance. Decisions made today are likely to continue to reverberate for a long time to come, so he does need our best wishes. He also is new in the sense that the budget probably was prepared by his hard-working predecessor, who is in the House, and I'd like to thank him for his work not only on the budget but certainly for refocusing the attention of this government to this very important public program that we have, which certainly will have a great deal of significance for our unfolding future.

That said, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say that the budget does show some fairly important commitments, increased commitments to the field of postsecondary education. It's a large system, a system which serves hundreds of thousands of students, probably close to 50,000 faculty and nonacademic staff, perhaps, if not more, a very large number. When you look at the impact of it purely in market and economic terms as an ongoing activity, operation, it perhaps affects the lives and the livelihoods of more than just those who either directly or indirectly work within the system. A very large number of Albertans provide the services and benefit from the economic activity generated by it. It's a very large and significant part of our society and economy.

I just want to say something about the sort of vision that is driving the budget, and that vision is articulated in the government budget documents. I submit, Mr. Chairman, that I've taken a close look at the vision that's the driving force. It's on page 70 of the business plan. It's a fairly comprehensive vision, but it does have, I think, some limitations to it which will affect the way the monies budgeted here will be spent.

The main focus of it is on creating skills and opportunities to enhance the workforce in the province. It contributes primarily to the development of the workforce. That is certainly one very important core objective. The vision appropriately underlines the importance of the contribution that postsecondary education activities make to the development of the workforce for the health of the economy, for creating more wealth, for creating more opportunities for individuals. For Albertans to be able to take part, to have rewarding employment and all of that, is important.

There are other parts of the vision that I think need to also be included that are not in there, that should be added to it, and that is the nonmarket significance of postsecondary education, the role of humanities, for example. Whether it's in universities or colleges or technical institutes, everywhere, I think, exposure to humanities is very, very essential. The guarantor of good in a civilized society, a society which has the sort of civic capacities built into its citizens, does pay attention to investment on the nonmarket side of postsecondary education, which are called the humanities and social sciences.

So the vision I think needs to be broadened, needs to be rearticulated to include a focus of a society that's growing, that's prosperous, that's increasing its economic capacities and economic frontiers to invest deliberately in inculcating, in providing opportunities for Albertans who partake in our postsecondary institutions to have the opportunity to learn in the areas which we call humanities. I wanted to make this point to start out. I find that that's one thing that I do find somewhat missing in the vision.

I was looking at some literature on this, Mr. Minister, and I would just very briefly draw attention to some of the arguments in favour of this. Public investment in the humanities benefits society not in monetary terms – true – but in terms of cultivating people with a stronger sense of humanity and citizenship. The consequences of funding the humanities are instrumental in securing a stock of public good, human capital, in terms of people who carry in themselves the resources of a civilized society.

From this perspective, then, it is difficult to overestimate how valuable a resource this is, that is the humanities. Each generation of students needs to ask questions about what it is to be a citizen, to be benevolent, to be human. The humanities are the location of this engagement. To the extent that professional faculties and applied sciences are even considerably occupied by the need to answer such questions within their own curricula – and that's happening – they have in a sense just learned from the *Oxford* dictionary's meaning of the word "humanize." So there is a growing recognition within the postsecondary institutions about this, and we need to certainly include that recognition in the vision statement that drives the budget document.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'll turn to some specific issues. I think the questions have been raised, and I think the minister has seized the significance of some of these questions related to the second lowest nationally – that is, among the provinces and territories – participation rate for the postsecondary age-going population to in fact take part in our postsecondary institutions. That should be a matter of concern. I know that that's why your predecessor has included in the review among its four major emphases the accessibility issue. But the fact that a very small percentage of Albertans in relative terms take part in the postsecondary system is not merely because there are not enough spaces there. That may be one reason. Affordability may be another reason. We need to pay some attention to it, to ask: why is it that in a province with such a fine and strong history of public education at the postsecondary level we are failing in that we are the second last in the percentage of Canadians taking

part in the postsecondary education system? So that's a huge issue. I think we need to pay attention to it and find remedies for it.

4:20

I hope the minister will carefully read the learning review that will be in his hands, the final report. He says in a couple of weeks. I know that it won't get lost in the black hole for him. When I was referring to this, I was talking about it reaching us. It would be important, Minister, if you would not only pay attention to what's in this report yourself but make the report available to get input and some reactions from other stakeholders, including members of this House. I include myself among those who would be interested in receiving the report, not just us but postsecondary stakeholders all over the province, you know, whether they're students, whether they're teachers, whether they're researchers, whether they're administrators, board of governor members. They would all like to have access to that report as quickly as possible. I wasn't being flippant yesterday when I talked of a black hole. I was trying to make a point.

In that, I hope that this question of relatively low participation rates will be somehow addressed. I'm looking forward to seeing if there are any answers there, potential answers to how we deal with that problem. I don't see in the budget statement papers any particular attention to that part. The accessibility matter is addressed, and I think the whole question of 20,000 new opportunities – no, it says that “15,000 new learning opportunities will have been provided by 2007-08,” and 20,000 such opportunities by 2008-2009. Then what's said here is that this “includes almost 12,000 full-load equivalent student spaces.” So I guess it translates into about 12,000 full-time student spaces.

My question to the minister on this is the following: how many of these spaces will be created at the university level, how many at the technical institutes and apprenticeship levels, and how many at the college level? Our system is quite complex and diverse, and I would like to have information on the distribution of this planned expansion on the accessibility side with respect to where these 12,000 full-time places will be found.

There is mentioned somewhere in the budget documents that the loan remission funds will be increased so that the student debt burden or loan burden can be reduced during their first and fourth years. I have a question for the minister on the amount of money that is available during 2005-2006 for this purpose, I think \$34 million for loan remission purposes under one or another program. Only about \$21 million of that, less than two-thirds of the money budgeted, was in fact used for remission purposes.

I'm trying to figure out why it is that in spite of the fact we hear from students that they're suffering from huge debt loads, we are underspending in the budgeted amount over that year. Are there some barriers? Is it because some changes have been made at the same time in the conditions for qualifying for remissions? Have they been made more difficult for students who qualify for the remissions, or what? Also, I would like to know how many students did apply during that last year for loan remissions and how many of them were successful in getting the remissions because that will give us some idea about why it is that we have fallen short of using the money available for such a dramatic need, a need that students really draw our attention to day in and day out.

I would ask the minister: if this information tells him that it is the tightening of the qualifying criteria for loan remissions, will he revisit those criteria to make it somewhat easier, in fact, for students to seek remission of their loans? I'm asking him to give me at least some indication that he will be inclined to revisit the changes that were made a couple of years ago, which may have made it more

difficult for students who take advantage of this very important program. Total loan thresholds I think were increased from \$20,000 to \$24,000 or perhaps beyond, so maybe that's what excluded or eliminated lots of students from being able to apply for these remissions.

Another question that I have for the minister is with respect to the funds that he referred to as having been increased for student financial assistance. Now, we know that the loans are applicable to students who go either to public institutions or nonprofit public institutions. They are available to all Albertans, but my understanding is that these loans are also available for for-profit institutions that operate in this province. They operate, I guess, on the basis of some sort of licences that they receive from the minister's own department. These may be short-term computer-related programs or massage programs and some others.

I know that I've been visited by students who are unhappy with respect to their experience of going to the institutions, but my question specifically to the minister at this moment related to the budget is if he knows, based on either last year's data or information that we have, perhaps in terms of projected distribution of these funds, what kinds of monies will be going to fund students who seek opportunity to get some training in these for-profit institutions and whether or not this portion of the student financing is increasing from year to year so that this House has some idea about the growth within the largely public sector, the nonprofit postsecondary system, or the for-profit sector.

One of the problems with the for-profit sector that's been brought to my attention by students over the last two or three years is that the provisions that we have for student government for nonprofits and for public institutions are absent in the for-profit sector. So student government through elections is simply not possible. Student representation, therefore, and a forum through which these students can express their concerns to the institution are simply not available. They are not sanctioned. They're not by legislation. If that is in fact the case – and the minister will be able to get this advice from his staff – then my question to the minister is: would the minister be willing to allow this rather, I think, quite acceptable practice, encouraging, in fact, student self-government in all institutions that receive, either directly or indirectly, public funds?

These private, for-profit institutions obviously do not get any direct funds from the Ministry of Advanced Education, I think, but they do get students who get funded by the Students Finance Board, which is public monies. In fact, my suspicion is that in comparison to public institutions or nonprofit, public institutions, a far larger percentage of students who go to these for-profit institutions are in fact publicly funded through the loan programs. I would like to ask the minister to look into this and see if he can confirm my suspicion that that is in fact the case, that a much larger proportion of students going to for-profit postsecondary institutions seek loans from student loan programs than is the case for other institutions.

There is a third problem with respect to the private, for-profit sector. [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired] I will return to this another afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4:30

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, I do have a very long list of people who wish to participate in the debate, and I do understand that Standing Orders do allow you 20 minutes at a time to speak if you so choose. Brevity would really help in getting more people to participate in the debate.

The hon. minister.

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try and be as brief as I normally am. First of all, I want to say to the hon. member

opposite that as he knows – and I've said it many times over the years – I have a great deal of respect for that hon. member. He's had a long career before this one in postsecondary, and I certainly want to offer him the same offer I made to his counterpart in the Official Opposition with respect to my door being open. We will do much better working together than against each other.

I fully agree with what you're saying with regard to the nonmonetary values of postsecondary education and the vision of including the humanities and the arts. As you know – I think it was last year – I did manage to get a motion passed unanimously in this Chamber with respect to fine arts in our high schools. So I think you know that I'm on the same wavelength there. Of course, it deals with quality of life issues. If we want to attract the best people to this province, they need to see a humanities infrastructure. They need to see arts and so on because they can go and live anywhere. The best people can live anywhere, and they like to be able to use their leisure time in some of the finer sides of humanity. So you won't get any argument from me on that score.

The lowest participation rate in postsecondary . . .

**Dr. Pannu:** The second lowest.

**Mr. Herard:** The second lowest. Thank you. Don't want to go any further.

It's a real problem in a hot economy because there is so much attraction to those students who might be marginal in their drive to succeed in education. It sometimes looks so much easier to go out and get a job instead of the drudgery of going to school. We need to work with that. Part of what I was talking about before is that every one of our kids has a flame for something, and if we can learn to fan it earlier in life so that they become motivated through those difficult raging-hormone years, if they can focus and, in fact, be turned on to something and the parents support that, then I think we're going to lose a lot fewer of them out of our high schools, and we will have people who will want to go on to postsecondary, be it on the academic side or the vocational side. So I think that we need to work together with K to 12 to start that process so much earlier and get our kids motivated. We need to find ways to find that vocation.

I'm not sure if I got the right impression with respect to releasing the information that you were asking for coincidentally with the stakeholders and so on, but let me say this: I don't know what commitments may have been made, but whatever commitments have been made I will honour. If there was a commitment to provide the information simultaneously, whatever, I will honour those commitments. Let me check into that because I'm not sure.

Now, with respect to the spaces you asked some very specific, technical questions that the 150 hours since I was sworn in do not really prepare me for. Therefore, I'd be more than happy to let my professionals answer all of those questions in detail for you.

Also, loan remissions. I don't know why the entire amount was not used, but we will find out and let you know. And, yes, I will look at the remission system as you suggest, perhaps, really trying to understand it and how it works and why it works or why it doesn't work in some cases.

The same situation for profit education and how much funding goes into that side of it. My officials are here today, they heard your questions, we'll prepare a response, and then maybe we can sit down and talk about it.

It's an interesting notion with respect to student government not possible. You know, that's almost un-Canadian. There's got to be something in there somewhere that says that you have the right to assemble and complain. So it's an interesting thing, and we'll look into that as well.

I think those were all the questions, and I have very little more information to share, Mr. Chairman, so I won't take very much longer.

Support for postsecondary learners shows an increase of \$27,500,000 from the 2005-06 forecast. The increase includes \$8,100,000 for the newly introduced rural incentive bursary. This new program will be available for rural Albertans eligible for a minimum of \$1,000 in loan assistance when attending accredited postsecondary programs in Canada.

Apprenticeship delivery shows an increase of \$411,000 from 2005-06. The increase results primarily from a projected increase in apprenticeship marketing activities. Apprenticeship marketing includes qualification assessments, technical training for apprentices from the Territories, as well as consulting services provided to international governments. These services are provided on a cost-recovery basis, and there is a corresponding increase in revenue, so this is a cost-neutral initiative to government.

We get down to equipment and inventory/purchases. Program delivery support shows a decrease of \$400,000 from '05-06, representing a reduction requirement for the student finance system renewal project. The system is used to process and administer provincial and federal student loans, grants, and scholarships. The renewal project will ensure that the system meets student needs for online self-service functionality. It would also increase the efficiency of the student assistance process.

Apprenticeship delivery also shows a decrease of \$1,353,000 from the 2005-06 forecast. The reduction results from the completion of the design and development phase of the apprenticeship, trades, and occupations management system, or ATOMS for short.

In conclusion, this government is committed to enhancing our postsecondary system, and Budget 2006 demonstrates this commitment. It is great news for our institutions, our stakeholders and partners in postsecondary learning. It's really nice when you start seeing quotes from virtually all of the institutions saying how excited they are about seeing this kind of a budget. So onward and upward, and I will need everyone's help to get this right.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education, I want to basically give you some kudos on what is transpiring in West Yellowhead, especially with your travelling show, especially for the apprentice system for welding. As you realize, with the ballooning population that has transpired in the city of Edmonton and accommodations and that, to get the theory, it takes removal of a person from their rural area into the city. This is really helping, so I want to compliment your staff on that for sure because that's really filling a void in our region.

4:40

The other thing I wanted to talk about was some dollars and cents for programming. I know that we had worked with the previous minister in previous years on programs, and they've worked very well in our region. As you realize, we have a partnership with the Yellowhead region consortium and the Pembina region consortium. That one works in Drayton Valley-Calmar and Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, but we have the same director there, so it works out well.

I'm just wondering if we can work with your department on other programs such as this. What I'm talking about is the aspect of the RN system. We had the school curriculum in YREC in Hinton. Our

people were able to travel from the other areas to Hinton to go to school in the YREC building, and they were able to get there. Their theory was there, and then they were able to work in our hospital.

The big thing that I find there: once they graduate, we know that they're going to stay in the region because that's where their homes are. We're seeing a lot of mothers now whose children have moved on to an age where they don't need the same amount of looking after as they used to in the younger ages. So we're filling that gap.

I'm just wondering if the minister can give me any idea if we come up with some more ideas like this to fill some other gaps that we have, especially in the health sciences, to help us move along so we can put in some program funding money. We don't need any bricks and mortar. Basically, all we need is program funding.

Then, like I'd stated earlier, with the aspect of the same director for the Yellowhead region consortium and the Pembina region consortium it works out very well. When you look at the scope of what we do, we even go into the constituency of Rocky Mountain House. So then you've got four MLAs that are being looked after from that perspective. The bottom line, I feel, is that you can entice a lot of people that cannot afford to leave their family to go into the city for the theory part of whatever course they're going to take.

We're also looking at another aspect. We're going to have to look at helping with the aspect of working with the oil companies. The oil companies now are having some trouble working with the aspect of not getting help. They have what they call PET, which is petroleum education training. What transpires is that they'll go out and try to get people to come and work for them. They'll have the theory portion done by Lakeland College, who will have the course at the YREC in Hinton, and in this way they can have the practicum in the field.

What we've done is we've worked with a lot of aboriginals in our area, and of course when they're in our area, we know that they're going to stay there, and they're going to have people to work. The positive thing that I find is that if they happen to be a Métis, one of the people from the Métis Association will co-sign them, or if they're from a different area, one of the chiefs will co-sign. So there's a commitment there. The last time we did that, there were 15 or 18 of them there, and it worked out very well because there was no discrimination on the aspect of whether they were male or female. They had both there. So I think that's a positive thing because then the oil companies are willing to put in some money to help this program.

So I'm just wondering what kind of partnership Advanced Education will do in looking at something like that. So if you can give me a background on program spending. We're not looking for any dollars and cents for bricks and mortars. We're just looking for program spending.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I appreciate, actually, some of the comments from the Member for West Yellowhead. Some of the initiatives that the department has made in terms of trading apprentices rurally have been good, and some of the ways to try and bring apprenticeship training closer to the person who is going to be the apprentice I think will only have great benefit in terms of the numbers of people who become apprentices. This is a critical area. As the government has identified, there are critical skills shortages, and I will concentrate my comments on apprenticeship.

In many ways, you know, we look at apprenticeship as having had a successful system over the past number of years, and a lot of the

people that are involved in the provincial apprenticeship committees and the local apprenticeship committees and the board are very happy with the results that they see as the end results. Indeed, the satisfaction of recent apprenticeship graduates is 91 per cent, which is pretty good, and those are the people that are coming out of the last year of their apprenticeship. But then I look at our needs. I look at what we must have here in our labour market. I look at the stresses and the distortions in the labour market, and I look at where we're going in the next two to five years and longer and beyond that and the need to deal with this apprenticeship system in some way that will bring some much better results than what we've seen.

I think we have a record number, 47,000 apprentices in our apprenticeship system right now. We had actually almost a record number – I forget – 4,500 graduates, 4,500 journeymen coming out of the system. Now, those figures have kind of stayed more or less the same in percentage over the last 10 years, and I think those figures tell you something that is very, very distressing.

If we were to have 1 in 10 of our grade 10 students get out of grade 10, there would be headlines. There would be just tremendous furor. If we were to have this problem that we have in so few journeymen graduates with so many in the system, we would be having just a tremendous amount of anxiety about what this is doing. It actually is a huge problem for our economy because what we're going to need in the next number of years as our economy shifts from conventional oil and gas, which is the real pull, the huge vacuum truck that's pulling people from almost every sector of the economy right now – it's what's hurting small business. It's what's hurting, you know, caregivers, whatever. It's rippling throughout.

It's actually not the oil sands at this moment, but the oil sands will begin to move into labour shortages and labour demands as we begin the construction of the upgraders near Edmonton and as we look to increased construction of oil sands primary development in some of the plants in the actual Wood Buffalo and Lloydminster and Peace River regions. They will begin to pull increasing numbers of tradesmen, and this is all going to be made worse by the fact of the greying of the population; 2012, I think, is probably going to be the date when we're at the height of it and the worst of it, the time when the baby boomers are retiring.

4:50

A number of questions to the minister that I would just like to reiterate are: how many spaces are there, actually, in the apprenticeship system in terms of being planned over the next one, two, and three years, and how do these spaces relate to the actual numbers that are necessary for each trade? Can they be broken down by trade?

The north and south factors. I'm getting reports of thousands of tradespeople coming in that will not have a spot this year in both the SAIT and NAIT traditional facilities. How can the minister deal with these tremendous pressures? I'm getting reports of people looking to line up for two days, bringing sleeping bags like they're at some rock concert, in order to get a spot months later in an apprenticeship training area, just to get their schooling in so that they can get their ticket. I'm getting reports all over the place of people just not being able to get their books signed by employers, especially on commercial sites where these employers are just using them for a few months at a shot and then sending them home and bringing on new guys, using them as cheap labour and saying that they're providing these numbers. Maybe that's hurting some of our numbers and hurting some of the ways that we're actually dealing with our training, inflating numbers, and they're not actually being trained.

I'm getting reports of sites with 12 and 14 and 18 apprentices on the job site and not a single journeyman. We're not talking 1 to 1

here or even going to 1 to 3, and these can vary between trades. A lot of these are commercial sites, to be truthful, but some of them are public monies, schools and such. Others are apartment buildings and things. We're seeing things that could be a problem for public safety down the road in terms of how these things are being built because a lot of them aren't being fully inspected in the end.

You know, there's a lot of talk about the RAP program being such a success. As the minister just reported, we have 1,400 kids coming through RAP, and it is a major increase, but 1,400 is not a lot when we look at our population. It's not a lot when we look at our needs, and it's not a lot when we look at our planning down the road. We have over a million kids in Canada unemployed and between 18 and 25, and these figures have been fairly consistent. Yet our average apprenticeship entry range is – you know, you get different figures, but maybe 25 is about right; it's certainly not 18. What are those numbers telling us? What are those numbers saying about how we're not preparing our kids for these very, very rewarding types of jobs and very rewarding types of careers?

I go into the schools in my area, and I tell all the grade 6ers that I can to get a trade. Many of the business leaders, many of the community leaders, many of the people that become very successful in life and in our communities come out of the trades. If they want to go to university later on, at least they can pay for it.

Again, back to the problems with apprenticeship. You know, there's obviously a huge problem with our system when we can't even document, when we can't even put numbers to, when we can't even have statistics on how many leave in the first year. There are no statistics kept on first-year leavers. I'm told: oh, well, you know, people will try out different things and move around and do this and that. Well, that's a pretty lackadaisical attitude, if you ask me, on how we're going to be training our people in critical skills areas. We're going to have kids bouncing around from here to there. Like I said earlier, many of them are being used as cheap labour and are not even having their books signed so that they can use these numbers another time.

Union, non-union: it doesn't matter. Union tends to be a little bit more methodical in how they watch and train their apprentices, and many of them are actually far more successful in their numbers. It would be nice if in some ways in more than just a few of the trades they could be empowered to ensure that they could indenture and watch the schooling of their apprentices as they go along to ensure that they are actually fully trained in a comprehensive manner that falls into many of the different areas that would be necessary and useful in their trade.

So often with this so-called multiskilling movement that we have going on right now, it's a deskilling movement that is bringing out people with, say, an electrical journeyman's ticket, and they spend almost all of their four years as a wire-puller, or they've gone on and done other things. We're getting fewer skills coming out of our systems. Yes, you know, in some of the final outputs in the high end of some of our apprenticeship systems we have had a successful system, Mr. Chair, but the reality is that it's beginning to fail. I would very much like to see some tracking of the first-year leavers and something done in that area.

The problems of these irresponsible contractors and the lack of policing, the lack of at least watching or somehow determining whether or not they are taking the training: the nature of apprenticeship is that most of the training is on the job, and because most of that training is on the job and apprentices are accredited for that training, there should be some ability to ensure that the training is taking place. The reality is that we must have some look at how our apprenticeship system is really working. If we are to deal with

critical skills shortages, we must look at these thousands of apprentices that don't have spots. We must look at the real necessity of bringing out tradesmen who have truly portable tickets so that they can bring to each job that they go to the skills and the versatility that can give them the ability to move on in their trade and in their jobs, become masters, whatever, and to give their careers and their clients, the people they do business with, the best product they can.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Member for West Yellowhead, I look forward to visiting your area and soon. In fact, I want to absolutely visit every single system that we have out there to make sure that I get a really good understanding of what's happening where the rubber meets the road. So you can invite your consortium. We'll make arrangements. We'll sit down, and I'll listen. We'll look for ways to look for opportunities in all of this. I know that your consortium is very much involved with the public school system there and the Catholic school system where they're all interconnected on SuperNet, and there may be some things there that we can look at in terms of applications. I know that West Yellowhead over the years has been a long way ahead of many other areas with respect to the use of technology. You know, there may be some solutions there.

Another idea. I don't know if this will work in your area. A friend of mine just retired a couple months ago, and he was tickled pink to have been asked by his employer to come back for a day or two a week. He was just so happy to do that for his employer, to come back and mentor his successor, to come back and talk to kids about the career that, in fact, he had. So that could be an idea of sort of celebrating our golden years and the ability to nurture and mentor kids.

5:00

Edmonton-Manning, it seems to me that you seem to have a fairly good understanding of apprenticeship. I know that my officials have taken good care to take good notes with respect to your concerns, you know, how many spaces over three years and all of those kinds of things. I'm sure that we'll get back to you in due course, and I thank you for those questions.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My remarks are going to be based on discussions from Public Accounts this morning, and they're centred around the large percentage of students who are not completing high school after five years or entering grade 10. We see 31 per cent in 1997-98, and while it has improved, it is still high, with 23 per cent still not completing school. Improving the high school completion rate is an issue for the Education minister, I realize, but I would like to talk about what happens to these adults after they leave the K to 12 system.

I just took some rough figures from this morning. Based on the 590,000 students we have in the K to 12 system in Alberta, we have approximately, according to this, 20 per cent, 118,000 students, dropping out of school. I think all of us want Albertans to be productive and fit into society, and I think the K to 12 and Advanced Education systems seem to have this, it seems to me, as their goal, sir. Statistics Canada shows that about 90 per cent of Alberta 25- to 34-year-olds have at least a high school diploma or have attended



some postsecondary education institution. Once these students leave their school, their education becomes an issue for the Ministry of Advanced Education.

I really would pose a few questions for the Minister of Advanced Education. Will the minister consider giving incentives to adults to return and complete their grade 12 education? Again, if we look at those 118,000 people out there, it seems to me there's a requirement or a need to give them some incentive to return to school. Looking at the manpower situation that we have in Alberta, I think this would be worth looking at, sir.

Given that adults who do return to grade 12 may have to leave the workforce at least part-time and potentially give up their wages only to pay a tuition fee, would the minister consider funding the costs of education to grade 12 tuition in Alberta for those kinds of adults, sir? I believe that if we check on that, you'd see that B.C. is doing this, paying tuition fees for adults who come back to school and are successful.

The other thing I'd like to ask the minister: would he try to ensure that there is adequate access for adult learners to complete their high school level in the rural parts of the province? If I remember the 20-year plan that I looked at, I noticed that there was some incentive to school districts to look at the whole business of community schools. I think that in a lot of communities the school is the lifeblood of the community. I think there would be some way of advancing or helping people in the rural areas to get their upgrade. Of course, if you added the tuition factor in terms of an incentive to go back to school, I think we'd be looking after that population.

Maybe the last step the minister would consider: would the minister take steps to allow large groups of adults who have not completed their high school to return and complete an apprenticeship program or ensure that they have the prerequisites to enter other postsecondary programs? I would ask him if he would look at that.

Now, wandering away and looking at a thing I got from my researcher this morning – and I just throw this out to you. At the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia they no longer collect tuition for the PhD level students. I guess the question to the minister: has the minister given any consideration to encouraging either the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary to do the same? My question is in terms of the vein of highly specialized people. I think of the question of the cancer bill, the need to get very, very highly qualified people. I think this could be a good incentive to attract those kinds of people to Alberta, and I think it would be worth having a look at, sir. I'll leave that with you.

Maybe I could wander to one more thing that you said in question period, and believe it or not, I was listening to you. You said that there are 1,400 students enrolled in the RAP program. That's commendable, but I'd like to know what percentage of that group will complete their apprenticeship program and complete it by exploring a trade and being successful in the trade.

So those are some questions, Mr. Minister. Again, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment. I hope you can keep Dave Taylor in line. It's very difficult. We've tried. I know you're the man that can do it.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Herard:** If there are others who want to ask questions, maybe I can wait. I want to thank the hon. Member for St. Albert with respect to his comments because I know that he, too, has been involved in education a long time.

In terms of incentives for adults to return to school, a lot of that takes place I think in the Human Resources and Employment area. Typically, people will be in the much lower income area. They could be, you know, single-parent families and so on. So an awful

lot of support is given to give people the skills they require. I will certainly ask my department to consider your ideas, and we'll get back to you on it.

One of the things that I'm wondering about is something that I've seen overseas – for example, in Belgium and France and so on – where what they look at is: here are a couple thousand jobs going unfilled and here are 2,000 or 3,000 people on welfare, on and off. What they do is talk to these people and find out: if you had the opportunity to have any job out there that is available, which one would it be? Then they look at how much skill deficiency there would be between being able to do that job. Then they enter into a contract with the employer that says: if this individual gets the skills they need in six months, will you give him the job? Yes, they get into a contract. For some of them it might take a year, but in the examples I saw there was one hundred per cent success when there was an agreement made and a contract made. These people are now buying their first homes and cars. So I think there are some things that could be done with respect to that.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, there are about two minutes left. Would you like to use them?

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll try to do that. Perhaps in the very short time that's remaining, I can draw the attention of the minister to the business plan, page 77. He and I were speculating about why it is that the participation rate in the postsecondary system in Alberta is so low, as low as we know that it is.

5:10

There may be an answer, Mr. Minister, in that table on page 77. The very last item, 2.g, tells you of Albertans' perceptions about whether they see that the learning system is within the means of most Albertans. The percentage of people who think that it's within their means is steadily going down. It was 75 per cent five years ago. This year, regarding this number, it is 46 per cent, less than half of them. The cost of going to postsecondary institutions obviously is seen as a major factor by Albertans in general, so something needs to be done on the issue of affordability.

If you don't have this document, I'll certainly make it available to you. It was given to me by the Council of Alberta University Students just last week when they came to see me. I'm sure that they met with you or met with your staff. They have some proposals about how to cut down tuition costs. Those are the most visible ones. I'd like to get your reaction to their proposals.

One of the main suggestions that they're making is to delink the tuition revenues that an institution makes from the operational costs of the institution. They're suggesting some alternatives to it. What we have done – saying that 30 per cent of the operational costs of colleges and universities and institutes should come from tuition fees – is a great concern to students. I think that the tuition costs have been driven up because the overall operating costs of institutions move up very, very fast for a variety of reasons. Students are seeking a delinking of the tuition fee policy from the operating costs of the universities and colleges. I'd like to get your response to that. Students, I think, would very much appreciate you taking a close look at this document and its contents.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than

5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the following question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Advanced Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases	\$2,068,035,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$103,900,000

**The Deputy Chair:** Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Stevens:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report on the vote of the estimates of Advanced Education and beg leave to sit again.

[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 Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, for the following department.

Advanced Education: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$2,068,035,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$103,900,000.

**The Acting Speaker:** Does the Assembly concur in the report?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Stevens:** Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn and reconvene this evening at 8 o'clock in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]