

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 13, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/04/13

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Deputy Speaker: Let us pray. We confidently ask for strength and encouragement in our service to others. We ask for wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 32 special guests from the constituency of Bonnyville-Cold Lake. With us today are 23 grade 7 students from Ardmore school. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Jackie Wakaruk, parents Mrs. Darlene Loiselle, Mrs. Kami Bowers, Mrs. Becky Charlton, Mrs. Diane Adrian, Mrs. Becky Cudmore, Mrs. Cathleen Matthews, Mrs. Sharon Theroux, and bus driver Mr. Maurice Roux. My guests are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're looking good in the chair today, I might say.

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me today to rise and to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 51 visitors from my constituency, the area of Calmar, which is a booming little community. These constituents of mine have the good pleasure of being in a brand new school, just recently opened. Today they're accompanied by their teachers, Mrs. Jeanette Wilson, Mrs. Kathleen Sikliski, and Mrs. Sue Biddell and her son Tom. The eight parent helpers with this group of 51 are Mrs. Tammy Hutman, Miss Sherene Sawyer, Mr. James Snider, Mrs. Crystal Fandrick, Mrs. Karen Stepanko, Mrs. Charmaine Robinson, Mrs. Lee-Anne Peel, and Mr. de Martines. They're in the members' gallery. I'd ask them all to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special group that is joining us in the public gallery today, and that is the ESL program from St. Joseph high school. This is a very keen group of people, and we appreciate them coming to visit us in the Assembly. I'd ask them to please rise. I'd also like to introduce their group leaders, Ms Gerry Dawson and Mrs. Cheryl Place. Please join me in welcoming them.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my delight and indeed honour today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly three guests, who are seated in the public gallery. They are Erica Bullwinkle, Thomas Bullwinkle, and Erica's daughter, Rachel Weinfeld. Erica is a prominent community activist and currently serves as the first vice-president of the Alberta NDP. Thomas is here to watch the proceedings for the first time as he is visiting our great province from London, England, where he makes his home. Joining them, of course, is Rachel, who has been active on the steps of the Legislature for the medicare vigils, providing sound and technical support. I'd ask these guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to introduce to you and through you a gentleman who I had a keen discussion with on politics in Alberta. I subsequently invited him to come to the Legislative Assembly. His name is Ryan Antonello. He's a grade 11 student from St. Francis Xavier school. I would ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any others at this time? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a student at the University of Alberta who steals time away from his university studies so that he can work for me in our Glenora constituency office as a special researcher. Peter Marriott is seated in the public gallery with two of his friends, who won't tell me their names. I'd invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Cleanup of Contaminated Sites

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Environment minister likes to say that the polluter pays. For a while there it looked as though he meant it. He indicated that he had a plan for a cleanup fund that would come entirely from industry to deal with contaminated downstream oil and gas sites where companies default on cleanup costs. Then he met with CAPP, reversed his decision, and said that the funds should come from royalties. In other words, the polluter doesn't pay; the people do. To the minister: what did CAPP say to make him do such a one-eighty?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what planet the hon. member is on, but what he just said is totally unfounded, untrue, and without any basis. The polluter continues to pay, following the law of protecting our air, land, and water in this province.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, if the payment comes from royalties, that ain't the polluter paying.

Who does the minister think is responsible for contaminated orphaned downstream sites, the industry or the public?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the past and will say again in this House today and will say again in the future, the

polluter pays because it is the expectation and it is the value that Albertans share with this government that the polluter pays, and we will enforce and ensure that they comply with paying.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister then assure Albertans and all who live on a planet where the sky is blue that this cleanup fund will be developed through new funding collected from the industry and not from the royalties that belong to the people of this province?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I'm so encouraged that the Minister of Finance likes the idea of the environmental endowment fund, that I know you have made reference to in the past as well. Let me make it so perfectly clear: in this province if there is an industry out there, if there is a citizen out there, they will pay because it's an Alberta law. They will continue to pay, and we'll ensure that they will continue to pay.

The Deputy Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Cleanup of Hazardous Spill at Wabamun Lake

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week in the House I asked the hon. Minister of Environment a question about the policies of his ministry regarding hazardous spills, specifically: is it the policy of this ministry to hold both the owner of the materials spilled and the transporter responsible for the cleanup? At Mitsue Lake Celanese is cleaning up the spill. Where is Imperial Oil at Wabamun? To the Minister of Environment: will the minister please tell us what the policy of his ministry is? Are both the transporter and the manufacturer responsible for cleaning up the spills or not? What is the policy?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, it's indeed my pleasure to share with the hon. member, as I have in the past and as I actually shared with many members relative to instances that have just taken place in the last couple of weeks as well as the last month or two, where, in fact, the polluter pays. If an industry is responsible, they will pay.

I think it's important to recognize the proactive approach that Alberta Environment took in terms of containing the actual area where, in fact, an unfortunate spill took place. But, clearly, without any question the polluter pays, not the people of Alberta.

1:40

Mr. Bonko: Can the minister explain, then, why Imperial Oil, with the money and expertise to clean up spills, was not held responsible at the Wabamun disaster along with CN? This is not a question of law; it's a matter of policy.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, as you've mentioned a particular company, Imperial Oil, let me give you one example of how the enforcement orders that we had issued are coming to be because of the strong Alberta law that we have in this province, that certainly is supported by the people of Alberta and the citizens that give us this job. Let me give you an example: the refinery down in Lynnview Ridge. In fact, Imperial Oil originally, when it first came out, said that they were not responsible. Well, do you know what happened? Through the enforcement order Imperial Oil has in fact bought over 200 homes because of their responsibility that took place on the contaminated site.

I want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that on that kind of strong, strict law that we are taking, we're working in partnership. We do not believe in this idea of nail and jail and fair and square. What we think is important is that there is a constructive dialogue to ensure that our environment continues to be in fact supported and protected. And that's exactly what this ministry – I'm so proud of the 800 people in this ministry that are doing and living that each and every day.

Mr. Bonko: Last question to the Minister of Environment. Given the absence of Imperial Oil at Wabamun will the minister come clean and admit that this policy was changed due to the failure of his ministry to respond to the Wabamun disaster? The Premier himself admitted that the government was lax.

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, first of all, what the hon. member has just said is totally out of context. Again I say to him that in terms of the protection of our environment, sustaining our environment, we issued, in fact, enforcement orders within the first 48 hours. Let me ask members of this House: did you know that that was the quickest turnaround of enforcement orders ever in the history of this province? So I can say that not only are we talking; we are acting.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, it's important to note – this is important to note to the planet that members are on – that vacuum trucks are out there as we speak, this very minute, in fact, taking and remediating with CN based on our enforcement order. So action is taking place right now, based on the very proactive work that Environment is taking and will continue to take today, tomorrow, and well into the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Rod Love Consulting Inc.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, in the past five years the Premier's former chief of staff has billed various departments more than \$400,000 while at the same time working as a lobbyist for big business. Unfortunately, the lack of a lobbyist registry in Alberta means that we have absolutely no idea who he was lobbying for. It sounds like double-dipping to me. To the Minister of Finance: can the minister prove to Alberta taxpayers that Rod Love was not lobbying for the insurance industry at exactly the same time that he was paid to provide verbal advice to the ministry on auto insurance reforms? Can you prove it?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, maybe it behooves the hon. member opposite to prove that he was rather than just casting aspersions.

Mr. R. Miller: Mr. Speaker, Rod Love doesn't want to give any comment in the public domain, and the ministers don't want to give any comment in this House.

To the Minister of Energy: can the minister prove to Alberta taxpayers that Rod Love was not lobbying for the gas and oil industry at exactly the same time that he was paid to give verbal advice to the ministry on royalty rates? Can you prove it? Yes or no.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, these contracts have come before. Many contracts or consultants are used, a very normal practice. Continuously they provide strategic advice on numerous topics. What is important to note, though, is that I don't think it does anybody good to besmirch the name of any individual, Rod Love or

another. It's simple to come forth with allegations and impugn the reputation of individuals. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the Minister of Energy has the floor.

Mr. Melchin: They're not interested in hearing the answer, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Miller: Every day this week I've asked the questions. No answers yet.

To the Minister of Finance. The first sponsorship article that appeared in the *Globe and Mail* stated, "The Chrétien government has paid a company with close Liberal ties a total of \$550,000 to produce a report of which no trace can be found." That was the *Globe and Mail* talking about the federal government. Mr. Speaker, my question for the Finance minister: what is the difference? What is the difference between that scandal and Mr. Love's verbal contracts with this Conservative government? What is the difference?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the terms of the contract have been made public. As I've said before, I was not the minister who entered into the contract, but it is up to the minister to ascertain as to whether they are satisfied that the terms of the contract were met. What I have done – and I tabled this in the House yesterday. On December 13 – and I think that's probably about three weeks after I was appointed minister – I put a process in place on how contracts would be handled by the Ministry of Finance. That came into effect on January 1, 2005. If the hon. member wants to question me on any contracts that I have signed or entered into, I would be most pleased to do that.

In this House we have repeatedly – repeatedly – answered the questions on this contract. It states clearly in the contract that part of the contract was strategic advice. It does not state in the contract anywhere that it must be in written form. Mr. Speaker, we have answered those questions.

I understand the problem that this group has. We live in a province today that is wonderfully abounding with economic activity. We're debt free. We have the best fiscal framework in the country, the best fiscal environment in the country. Companies are moving here constantly. Our immigration of people here is constant. It's really difficult to find anything that this government has done wrong, so we centre on old news, whether it's an old contract there or a 20-year-old land contract. Get current.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, were you trying to indicate a point of order earlier? Apparently not.

First ND opposition question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Attendance at World Health Care Congress

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eleven thousand dollars are being spent to send the Minister of Health and Wellness on a taxpayer-funded junket to Washington, DC, early next week. The minister will be attending a conference that can only be described as a health care privatizer's wet dream. Sponsors include *The Wall Street Journal*, a who's who of HMOs like CIGNA health care, and Viagra maker Pfizer, the world's biggest drug company. Most exciting of all the minister gets to hear an inspirational video message from one of this government's best pals, President George W. Bush. To the Deputy Premier: given that we've been told time and time again that the government is not interested in pursuing

American-style health care, why then is the Health and Wellness minister spending taxpayer dollars to attend an American health care conference focused exclusively on for-profit health care?

Mrs. McClellan: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member would do well to look at the wording of his preamble with the students in the gallery here. I find it offensive and question whether it should be dignified with an answer. However, I'll assume that there are writers and it hasn't been read prior to.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing that I want to make clear is that this government is open – open – to all information to make decisions, not a closed mind like the opposition members here. It's their way or the highway.

Our health system is so precious to the people of this province and, indeed, the people of this country that the people of this province are willing to enter into a debate. To enter into a debate, you should go in armed with information and intelligence, and any way that we can gather that only moves this consultation forward in a positive way.

1:50

Mr. Martin: Well, Mr. Speaker, I wish that the minister was as open with Albertans as they are with the group that she's talking about.

Given that the U.S. spends 50 per cent more GDP on health care than Canada does, exactly what lessons about sustainability does the government expect its Health and Wellness minister to learn from the likes of George W. Bush and the American corporate elite?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, neither the Canadian system nor the American system, both of which are quite opposite, stand up very well in the world for health outcomes. That doesn't mean that we give up or quit or that we don't try to learn. As I said earlier, any information that we can gather from others' experience, whether it's to move forward in a certain direction or, in fact, to ensure that we don't, I think is important. We'll remain open to hearing from all, including Albertans.

I resent very much this member inferring that, for example, I have not been open with the people I talk to. If he can show any evidence of that or any speeches that I've made that he was either at, which is doubtful, or not at that he heard from, I'd like him to bring them forward because, Mr. Speaker, the one thing I've never been questioned on is my integrity or my honesty.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, they always pull the integrity card when they don't want to answer the questions.

Given that there's overwhelming opposition in this province to the government's privatized, two-tier health scheme, what message is being sent to Albertans when the minister in the midst of this controversy jets off to Washington to attend a conference with the well-heeled apostles of chequebook medicine?

Mrs. McClellan: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think that if Albertans understood that we are not advocating a two-tier, private health care system, the answer is quite different. But if I were to put out a questionnaire that said, "Do you want a two-tier, private health system?" I'd probably get the same results. But what I would do is actually put forward our plan and ask Albertans for their comments back on it, which is exactly what the health minister has done, which every MLA on this side of the House is doing, and we'll take all of that information. We will actually listen to Albertans. They have some very good suggestions. From that will come a health plan that we hope will be sustainable into the future.

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

Agricultural Assistance

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Agricultural, Food and Rural Development. Mr. Minister, grain and oilseed producers are facing one of the worst financial situations in over 100 years this spring. This is not because of inefficiency, poor harvest, or a factor within their control, but rather it is a direct result of trade subsidies in other countries, including the U.S. Indeed, the current situation mirrors the economic hardship created by external international policies and treatment with respect to Canadian softwood lumber and the ban of Canadian cattle under the BSE crisis. Will the Alberta government and industry step up to these challenges? Alberta farmers are facing a crisis head-on right now, this spring. Considering the economic plight of these farmers, why won't the minister consider an acreage payment this year until trade issues can be straightened out and commodity prices rise to the realistic sustainable levels?

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had a little bit of difficulty hearing the last part of that question because some of the members on the other side, I guess, didn't want to hear what is actually quite a good question. The hon. member has rightfully pointed out that we do have a crisis in our agricultural sector today. He has rightfully pointed out that the grains and oilseeds sector is facing some very serious challenges not just in Alberta but across this country, across western Canada in particular.

As it relates to an acreage payment, or per-acre payments, we have done a lot of analyses on that. We've got a lot of history on acreage payments. The global economy and the global subsidies are a perfect example of acreage payments and why they don't work, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the federal government has recently had an acreage payment out there that I'm starting to get calls about: why am I not receiving any dollars? With acreage payments the first thing is: what's fair? Should forage be included in an acreage payment? Should we include all 52 million acres of farmland in this province? Should we be putting more dollars in the south versus more dollars in the north? Should we be doing things on the Wheat Board side or on the oilseed side? You know, these are the things that a per-acre payment does not address, and that's why it doesn't work.

We are working through the advance program under the CAIS program. We are trying to make sure that producers who have need are being addressed through that program, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, it is starting to work. We're also talking to the federal government about those issues.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to remind all hon. members that there are classrooms in the galleries today, and this building is serving as a classroom of sorts for proper parliamentary conduct.

The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize if the hon. member has already answered this question because I really had a tough time hearing it. Mr. Minister, I fully understand that the federal government is contemplating changing CAIS; however, farmers are now receiving bills demanding repayment of their 2004 CAIS advances. Therefore, would you consider writing off these bills or at least delaying payment until . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, there's no preamble on the second and third questions.

Mr. Horner: Again, a very interesting question, Mr. Speaker. The equity loss payments that are out there are from previous years, and these interim payments were based on an estimate of the loss. The short answer to the hon. member's question is that we have a number of different opportunities and options for the producers, one of which is to simply allow these overpayments to be taken out of future entitlements of the CAIS program. Indeed, the producers could even extend it out over a number of years under a repayment program. But, again, we are looking and trying to make sure that we put as many options in front of the producers as we possibly can because we recognize the hurt.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, what else do you plan to do either with the federal government or without them to enable farmers and ensure that they are able to plant their crops this spring? It's a critical issue.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. member: I agree; it is a critical issue. For the past three weeks I've been out touring the province with producer meetings, talking about how we are best able to meet this need, how we are best able to meet the short term as well as the long term. We've had producer meetings in Airdrie and in Westlock and in Red Deer. We're going to be culminating in other meetings across the province. Ag Financial Services Corporation has held 32 meetings across the province in the last 30 days. We've actually had another 18 meetings with regard to the future of crop insurance and the future of the CAIS program.

To answer as well partly on the CAIS initiative, last night in this House, Mr. Speaker, I spoke about the actual convergence of our intent as it relates to the CAIS program with the federal government. To the current there's close to half a billion dollars' worth of program dollars available to producers right now through the programs that are out there today. We are also asking the federal government and pressuring the federal government for responses from some of the recommendations which we've made as it relates to getting dollars into producers' hands now because it is a national problem through a national program. We'll continue to push for those answers.

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

Apprenticeship Training

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Close to 5,000 apprentices could not find training school spots in southern Alberta in the last year. Close to 5,000 apprentices in northern Alberta had the same problem. The new spots at NAIT and SAIT and colleges do not come close to meeting the demand. Students plan to line up overnight for registration spots so that they can get into school months later. Young people are crying to work, and they're crying to learn their work, yet this government is allowing foreign contractors and their temporary foreign workers into our Alberta oil sands under Alberta's memorandum of understanding to temporary foreign workers in the oil sands. My question is to the Minister of Advanced

Education. When will this government wake up and address the growing crisis of not enough school spots for new apprentices in Alberta?

2:00

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I hate to ask this. Because there was so much noise, I didn't hear the hon. member, but I don't think I'll ask him to repeat. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, please proceed.

Mr. Herard: Thank you. It's an important question, so let's not deal with it that way. You know, we now have more than 47,000 apprentices.

Mr. Cenaiko: How many?

Mr. Herard: Forty-seven thousand apprentices, an increase of 98 per cent since 1995. This includes 18,000 new apprentices last year alone. So we're going in the right direction. We now have 1,100 aboriginal apprentices, which is an increase of 400 per cent, and I think that there is a lot more that can be done there with our aboriginal community. We now have 1,400 high school students enrolled in the registered apprenticeship program, and that is growing in leaps and bounds through Careers: the Next Generation, a foundation that deals with our schools, also staff from my department who are deployed throughout the province to find new apprenticeships. So, Mr. Speaker, I think we're doing a lot to increase the number of spaces.

Mr. Backs: They're lining up, and they're not getting in.

A second question, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Advanced Education: what will this government do to ensure that apprentices do not lose valuable work experience and employment by being displaced by thousands of temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware that there are thousands of temporary foreign workers out there. One thing for sure that I do know is that when we do get temporary foreign workers, we make sure that they have the necessary skills in one of our 20 certified apprenticeship programs to do the job.

Mr. Backs: What about our apprentices?

A supplementary, Mr. Speaker, to the minister of human resources: when Rod Love was advising the government on relaxing rules for apprentices and trainees to benefit merit shop contractors, was Rod Love acting as a paid lobbyist for merit shop or acting as a paid consultant to the government or both at the same time?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, you can personally call Rod Love and talk to him about it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Agricultural Fertilizers and Pesticides

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta farmers have enough challenges with BSE, poor weather, and erratic commodity prices. The last thing they need is more difficulty just basically running their operations. I'm hearing from my constituents that two products they depend heavily on for their operations are no longer

available. My first question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Why isn't 34-0-0 ammonium nitrate fertilizer available to farmers anymore, and what's the government doing to make it available to farmers?

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

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason that 34-0-0 ammonium nitrate fertilizer is no longer available to farmers is because Agrium, who is the company that made this particular product, stopped manufacturing the product last year. They were the only manufacturer in Canada, and they ceased production in June of last year. They stopped making this product because it could be used as an explosive when combined with diesel fuel, and this was unfortunately found to be the explosive used in the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. Agrium has advised our department that the liability they faced by manufacturing this product was more than they were willing to accept.

They have, Mr. Speaker, developed a new polymer-coated urea product called environmentally smart nitrogen, or ESN, and the interest in moving this type of product, as it's proven in the U.S. to be up to 25 per cent more productive, is that it reduces the number of passes in the field; therefore, it actually reduces emissions and environmental impact, which is, of course, in Alberta the law.

We're also exploring manure management as a way of meeting some of these nutrient needs. In fact, we're supporting a number of areas of research in particular as part of our grains and oilseed strategy. We've put forward funding through the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund for the development of slow-release fertilizers, and these will contribute to both greater productivity and reduced environmental impact.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental for the same minister is on the availability of another surefire product farmers rely on, which is strychnine for pest control. Will we have enough strychnine this year? Again, what's the minister doing to make sure that it's available to farmers who need it to control gophers?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Agriculture continues to support the safe, proper, and appropriate use of fresh mix strychnine bait to control Richardson's ground squirrels, commonly known as gophers. The year 2006 is the third year that producers will have unimpeded access to a fresh strychnine-based bait product, which our research found is much more effective than dry strychnine bait. In past years both Alberta and Saskatchewan received emergency registrations for strychnine from the federal government, allowing it to be used in the province specifically for ground squirrel control. Last year the Pest Management Regulatory Agency of Health Canada allowed Canadian manufacturers to continue selling fresh bait products to farmers. So it is available for producers to use this year.

One more point, Mr. Speaker. The use of strychnine has some drawbacks, adequate supply being one of them, so we are looking at what else can be done to control these pests. We've involved a

multistakeholder steering committee, Richardson's ground squirrel integrated pest management strategy. Our role on the steering committee is to evaluate current control measures and technologies and to seek out others.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Sale of Edmonton Ring Road Land

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 6 in this House the hon. minister of infrastructure replied to a question from the Official Opposition on the sale of 260 acres of prime residential land in southwest Edmonton for \$3 by stating: "Incidentally, yes, there are four parcels. It's about 800 acres." My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. Given that the minister tabled documents on Tuesday of this week indicating that four parcels of land totalling 504 acres were sold to the government by Mr. Joseph Sheckter for \$10.2 million, where are the remaining 300 acres of land located that he talked about?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, there were four parcels. As it turns out, we retained one entire parcel. So the number of acres that we returned were all parts of those other three parcels.

Obviously, the member is not understanding the whole process, so I think maybe I'll try to break it down into something that's much more simple that maybe he can understand. Given that it's Easter time, as my example I'm going to use chocolate Easter eggs. Now, the member, the purchaser, wants to purchase 504 Easter eggs. He finds a vendor that has in a bag about 790 of them. So he pays to the vendor the price for the 500 then proceeds to pick out the ones that he wants, and he returns the others to the seller. Now, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what happened here. We took the land; we divided out what we needed and then returned the rest to the vendor.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. When you told this House that there were 800 acres of land involved in the transaction, we can account for 500 acres of land in the documents that you tabled in this Assembly on Tuesday. Again, where are the other 300 acres, and how much, if any, has been returned to Mr. Sheckter for a dollar per parcel?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, if he wishes to have the details, I can tell him about the details. We had one parcel that contained some 534.29 acres. We bought 274.02 of those acres, leaving a total of 260.27 acres that belonged to Sheckter, and there are two titles for those. Then we get into another parcel, and it had some 29.23 acres. On that one, there are 25.89 that were returned. Then we've got another parcel that has some 133.14 acres in it, and we didn't return any of those. We kept it all. Then we have another parcel where we bought 68 acres and returned 4.63. That's a total of 504.39 acres out of approximately 792 or 793 acres.

2:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that you tabled these documents on Tuesday to account for 504 acres of land, can you please table the documents that are related to the other 300 acres, which you talked about last week in this Assembly? Table the documents.

Mr. Lund: Well, Mr. Speaker, all he has to do is look on the documents and see the total acres in the parcel before they were subdivided. It's very simple, and I just gave him the numbers. Those are the numbers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

School Infrastructure in Calgary

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta continues to grow at a phenomenal rate. Due to the prosperity of this province and job opportunities we are now seeing the city of Calgary grow by some 20,000 to 25,000 individuals a year. As the suburbs continue to grow, so does the need for new schools. This government is building many new schools across the city of Calgary, but we know that school boards are looking for some 40 new schools in the city of Calgary as well as ensuring that our older schools stay vital. My questions are to the Minister of Education. As the minister who has recently taken on responsibility for school infrastructure, can you tell this House what process you'll be using or initiating to plan for school infrastructure and ensure that these much-needed schools will come to these communities?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, hon. member. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would be very happy to elaborate on that. The process has already in fact begun. It involves a number of meetings and consultations with our locally elected school board representatives, who are there for many purposes, this being one of them. That process also involves looking at the audit assessments, which our predecessor department had responsibility for. It also involves grouping the needs, if you will, for school infrastructure and capital-related infrastructure projects into a more strategic fashion that would allow us to move them ahead perhaps more quickly, and it involves a longer range plan, which we now have the ability to do.

I've written to the school boards, just a few days ago as I recall – I think it was Monday, Mr. Speaker – indicating what that new process would look like, and I'll be waiting to hear back from them very soon. We want to ensure that our future plan, which is to be ready by the end of June, takes all of these factors and numerous others into consideration so that we have something very solid to go ahead with by way of our schools for tomorrow action plan.

Mrs. Ady: To the same minister: will this plan take into consideration what to do with the reuse of sites perhaps that are surplus to school boards' needs now?

Mr. Zwodzesky: That's an excellent question as well. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, having met on numerous occasions now with some of the larger boards in the metro areas in particular, that there are literally dozens of vacant schools sitting on prime space. There are also dozens of other sites that have been municipally reserved, shall we say, for potential future schools to be built. For whatever reasons some of the community needs may have changed, so we're not seeing those sites taken up as readily as was expected. There's a lot of valuable property there that seems to be tied up at the moment. We have a committee that is chaired by the hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, and I'm on that committee with some others. We're looking at a number of strategic ways of improving the situation so that we can deliver on this new consultation process and the resulting plan that will come from it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Aon Consulting Inc.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On November 3, 2005, this government contracted with Aon Consulting to design a private insurance scheme for Alberta's health care system. According to the request for proposal the project was scheduled to take three months. As of April 5, six months later and three months late, the minister of health had still not received Aon's report. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. Given that Alberta Finance is on the steering committee for this project, will the minister tell us when the taxpayers get to see the report they paid for, even a draft report?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's a bit of a stretch to tie what the preamble of that question was into the actual contract that was awarded to Aon. This is a complex area, and that is why you look at a company with considerable experience to provide some modelling and information as to viability or what private insurance providers might be able to do. There is no reason that we would withhold or want this product not to be completed, so as soon as it is completed, we'll be prepared to discuss the results of it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. To the same minister: what explanation for the delay has Aon provided in their biweekly status reports?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I believe all of the time that it's taking to prepare this is simply the complexity of the issue.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will Aon, their parent company, or any wholly or partly owned subsidiaries be able to participate in the very market that Aon is designing?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I come back again: Aon was not contracted to design a market. I mean, you know, come on. We've got a question here in this province and across Canada that's very serious. I have said for over 10 years that health and the importance of a health system should cut above political lines. Everybody in this House should be working towards sustainability of this health system. All I ask of the hon. members opposite is just to interject some semblance of what we're actually contracting into what they say we are doing. You know, if you talk about Albertans and what they know or believe about the third way, all I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that any – any – comments that I've heard from across the way from both parties and the document that the hon. minister of health has filed bear very little resemblance.

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

EUB Hearings on Electricity Transmission Line

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a problem with the EUB decision to reconsider the west corridor for the proposed 500 kV transmission line west of highway 2. We should be debating much more than just the suitability of the west corridor in regard to

this project. The honest choice would be to open up all aspects of this 500 kV line. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Why doesn't the EUB stage a hearing to discuss whether consumers should be footing the bill for these new power lines with big hikes in their monthly power bills?

2:20

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, he's introduced different issues in the preamble versus the question. First off, there was a needs application, and a lot of work has been done, looking at different corridors where the transmission line could be held. There was an initial hearing on the location some time ago. So it's already had that. With respect to the cost of transmission, transmission has always been borne – we've all paid for it all. You and I, to be able to turn that switch on in our homes, pay for all of it: the power, the transmission, everything that goes into getting that power from the generation through to the transmission and distribution to our homes.

The great thing that will happen: we need these transmission lines to ensure that we can reliably provide the electricity to the homes with the growth that we have, unless he wishes that we don't have the power when needed; and, secondly, it will help reduce line loss. By increasing our capacity, there's actually going to be quite a substantive savings on the lines that are there today given the quantity and level of power that's being pushed over those lines.

Mr. Eggen: Given that it is the Conservative government policy to expand power exports from Alberta, why are the thousands of central Alberta landowners impacted by this massive new transmission line not being allowed to question this policy at the upcoming EUB review and variance hearing?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, the last I knew, this line comes from Genesee down through Langdon. I don't know, if you look on the map, that that's anything other than within Alberta. This line has nothing to do with exports despite the fact that exports can also add to the value of Alberta. This is to ensure the reliable delivery of electricity to Albertans so that they can depend upon it every day that they need it.

Mr. Eggen: How can the minister claim that key issues about whether this line is even needed in the first place have been properly dealt with when no landowner or environmental groups participated in the early EUB hearings, that were dominated by otherwise self-interested utility corporations?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, hearings have been available to all stakeholders. They've had a very open process. That's one of the very hallmarks of what the Energy and Utilities Board does very well. They have and intend to look at the interests. It is also in the interest of Albertans to have electricity to our homes. I suspect it's in the interest of us to see that we can turn the lights on in this building. Unless you're saying, "Let's turn them off," I guess that's a policy that we don't support.

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

Cleanup of Hazardous Spill at Wabamun Lake

(continued)

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Environmental spills are a popular topic today. The ice is started to come off Lake Wabamun, and oil is resurfacing on patches of open water. The ice is likely to

be completely off the lake in two weeks. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister elaborate on what is being done to clean up these patches of open water now to prevent returning migratory birds and wildlife from becoming contaminated with oil?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, responsible for migratory birds, may want to supplement as well, but I want to say: as I speak here in this Assembly this afternoon, CN, Alberta Environment, and vacuum trucks are out there, in fact, taking the oil off of the shore that the hon. member mentions. I think this is proactive.

I want to say that August 4 was an example of an ecological disaster. But, first and foremost, CN is complying with each and every one of the enforcement orders that we have issued. Furthermore, I'm looking forward in the next two weeks to visiting the site with one of the experts that we hired, Dr. David Schindler, from the University of Alberta. Certainly, I appreciate his advice and counsel as we move forward with this proactive plan.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: will the magnitude of this spring's cleanup be large enough to prevent any resurfaced oil from contaminating previously cleaned or unaffected areas of the lake?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, of course, I would love to be able to say here – I pray and hope that will be the end result and the outcome of the action that we're taking. But as we know, Mother Nature also plays a role in that, over which we have no control. Certainly, that is the objective of the Ministry of Environment, working with the good citizens and all those involved in this cleanup.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the Minister of Environment's opinion on whether or not Lake Wabamun will be available for boating and fishing this summer?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, my family has a cottage on a lake, and I want to say this: the value that Albertans place on our recreation and things such as Lake Wabamun, I think, is priceless. So it is my hope and prayer that based on our proactive good work – and to the hon. member, who I thank and who has been right there with us all of the time that we've been there, my vision is that hopefully they'll be out there windsurfing, that they'll be out there boating, and that they'll be out there enjoying what we've been blessed with in Lake Wabamun.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Space in Remand Centres

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta judges are being forced to reduce times served by offenders by giving 2 to 1 or even 3 to 1 credit for detention in the remand centres. Recent judgments have listed the deplorable conditions of the remand centres; for example, overcrowding and double-bunking, violation of religious freedoms, excessive force applied in relation to strip searches, and

on and on and on. All of this evidence has been presented in our courts. My question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Can the minister tell us if he's prepared to accept this evidence as factual and valid, and what is he going to do about it?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the decisions that judges make are those decisions that the public or legislators don't have an opportunity to question. The issue that the hon. member is discussing regarding the space at the Edmonton Remand Centre is one that is the top priority in our ministry right now, but when we're dealing with all of Alberta, we're talking about remand populations throughout Alberta. In the Edmonton area we are moving them to the Fort Saskatchewan correctional facility. We're utilizing all of our facilities to the maximum amount that we can.

As I mentioned, the ERC is the number one priority for our capital planning for the future. Mr. Speaker, you should know, though, that the remand populations 20 years ago were 30 per cent compared to 70 per cent for corrections; 10 years ago it was at about 50-50. At this point of time, right now, we're at the opposite end of the scale right across Canada, where 70 per cent of offenders are in remand and only 30 per cent are in corrections.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the same minister. Will the Minister of Public Security tell us if he thinks that giving drug dealers easy sentences because of the conditions in remand centres, which is standard practice, as the Minister of Justice suggested yesterday, is protecting the safety of the public?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I made a decision to work on this side of the law in my previous career as a police officer and not as a lawyer and work my way towards the bench, so my point of view and my personal thoughts regarding sentencing drug traffickers may differ from that of a judge or from a defence lawyer. So that's a difficult question for me to answer, but I can tell you what I would do with drug traffickers.

Dr. B. Miller: My last supplemental is for the Minister of Finance. Will this government finally get tough on crime and provide the funds for a new remand centre in Edmonton and an extension to the remand centre in Calgary?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General very properly has brought this forward to capital planning, and I'm sure that our associate minister responsible for capital planning will be working with the Solicitor General to ensure that it's included in our overall capital plan.

I would remind the hon. member that we spend triple in capital of any province in Canada, whether it's spent in our hospitals or our schools or our advanced education institutions or on our roads. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't apologize for our capital plan but do recognize that when you have a vibrant province like we do, when you have economic growth that's projected as ours is with no end in sight to that, it is important that we ensure that we have adequate capital.

One of the challenges, Mr. Speaker, was brought up by one of the hon. members earlier, and that is simply a workforce to accommodate that capital as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the hon. Member for Highwood, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(reversion)

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a portion of the 92 students who have come all the way from my constituency of Calgary-Varsity. With them are teachers Ms Smart, Ms Acorn, Mr. Marks, Ms Govier, Ms Sanden, Mrs. McFaul, and Mrs. Berg. If those teachers and their students could please stand, we'll celebrate their arrival.

Thank you.

2:30 **Vignettes from the Assembly's History**

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before I recognize the first member, I'd like to share the ever-popular historical vignette. This is quoted from the *Edmonton Bulletin*, August 27, 1936.

This is the people's forum. It is the debating chamber wherein proposed legislation must be studied, analysed and debated. The people have a right to know all sides of these discussions. If this province is to be properly governed the greatest freedom of debate must take place within this chamber before the public.

These words came from Samuel Augustus Gordon Barnes, who was first elected as a Social Credit member for Edmonton in the August 22, 1935, general election. Prior to becoming a member, he was an Edmonton school board trustee for 23 years and was president of the Labour Party of Edmonton in 1921. In 1940 he ran under the banner of the Independent Progressives and was not re-elected. He died on April 14, 1941.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

National Soil Conservation Week

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize National Soil Conservation Week, which runs from April 16 to 22. This year marks the 21st anniversary for recognizing the importance of soil conservation in our country.

Mr. Speaker, our Alberta producers are leaders in soil conservation and beneficial management practices. They are dedicated to improving their practices to conserve our important soil resources. For example, nearly two-thirds of our province's cropland is now being direct seeded to improve water infiltration, increase seed bed moisture, enhance organic matter, and reduce the risk of soil erosion. Soil conservation also supports and sustains crop, rangeland, and woodlot production and is important to maintaining other resources such as water, air, and our wildlife habitat.

Mr. Speaker, to continue to assist our producers in soil conservation practices, Alberta has developed a new, free online soil survey of the whole agricultural area of Alberta. This was no small undertaking as Alberta has 30 per cent of the agricultural area of Canada. The soil information viewer consists of soil and air photo information on nearly 26 million hectares, or 64 million acres, so that our farmers and our agricultural and environmental consultants can better understand our natural capital. By conserving our soil,

our stewards of the land can ensure that it functions properly to provide the food we eat and a healthy environment to live in, both for us and for future generations.

As we bring attention to National Soil Conservation Week from April 16 to April 22, it is important for us to acknowledge and thank our producers for being leaders in soil conservation and the sustainability of our agricultural industry.

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

Vaisakhi 2006

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we celebrate the 307th anniversary of the founding of Khalsa day, or Vaisakhi. It is one of the most important events in the Sikh calendar. Khalsa day, or Vaisakhi, marks the birth of the Sikh nation, and it is celebrated by Sikhs in every part of the world.

Today we celebrate the festival of a nation whose gurdwaras, the place of worship, are open to all: rich and poor, male and female, old and young. We celebrate a religion that respects all other religions and a people who seek to lead a life of compassion, humanity, pity, justice, equality, and truth.

Mr. Speaker, the Sikh community is a vital part of Alberta in every walk of life – in business, culture, legal, medical profession, politics – and they are adding to the strength of Alberta. I want to pay tribute to all Sikhs in Alberta who have done so much to foster an appreciation of the Sikh way of life.

In Alberta it is my mission to create a modern civic society for today's world, to renew the bonds of community that bind us together. That society is based on shared values: rights and duties which go together, tolerance, and respect for diversity. We work hard to provide opportunity for our young, whether it is in enhancing education or in giving hope to the unemployed. In return we demand responsibility, proper conduct, law-abiding behaviour. We stand up for our social, racial, and cultural diversity. We value our differences and respect each other's background, ethnic and religious. As the Sikh teaching tells us: never refrain from righteous acts, whatever the cost.

Thank you very much.

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

Salute to Alberta Athletes

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I was privileged to join our Lieutenant Governor and Community Development minister in Calgary to honour some of Alberta's best athletes. Of the 61 Canadians who won a medal at the 2006 Winter Olympics, approximately one-third are Albertan. If you include athletes who are living here to train at our tremendous facilities, that number jumps to three-quarters. The same success holds true for our Paralympians. Albertans accounted for seven of the 13 medals won in Italy. There is a strong support network behind each of these athletes that lets them be their best. We also recognized the efforts of Alberta coaches, officials, and mission staff who were part of Team Canada.

Last night also honoured the Alberta athletes of the year for 2005: skier Sarah Renner, bobsled pilot Pierre Lueders, junior skier Gareth Sine, junior skater Jessica Gregg, and the Edmonton Huskies Football Club.

Mr. Speaker, for many Olympians and Paralympians their athletic journey began long before they booked a ticket to Italy. It began as young athletes in a system that nurtured their talent and gave them the right environment to become even better. Thanks to the efforts of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation Alberta's developing athletes continue to prosper. These athletes will certainly benefit from an additional \$2.8 million going to the foundation as announced in Budget 2006. This is in addition to the \$12.8 million the foundation already puts towards sport development. This government has also invested in our elite athletes by providing \$23 million for the renewal of the Canmore Nordic Centre and \$600,000 for upgrades at the ski jump facility in Canada Olympic Park.

Few Canadians will ever reach the Olympic or Paralympic Games, but we all share in the celebration. Our athletes inspire us to be proud of our country and to pursue our own dreams, knowing that success is possible.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all the members of the House to join me in one final congratulations to Alberta's athletes for their efforts in Italy.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

National Child Care Program

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Alberta Federation of Labour and Public Interest Alberta released a highly informative poll, to which I hope the Minister of Children's Services will pay close attention. The poll explored Albertans' opinions about Prime Minister Harper's stated intention to tear up last year's agreements on child care and replace them with a hundred dollar monthly allowance.

The NDP has been strongly advocating against the Harper alternative and encouraging this minister to fight to protect the agreement and the underlying principles she signed with Ottawa and expand programs initiated following this agreement. Albertans unquestionably agree with our position: 50 per cent of Albertans are outrightly opposed to the Prime Minister's plan; 61 per cent feel the province should continue funding enhanced programs even if Ottawa reneges on the deal; significantly, 87 per cent agree that subsidies should be maintained for low- and middle-income parents so they can afford quality child care; and 85 per cent agree that the provincial government should continue to finance wage improvements and professional development for child care workers.

It should hardly be a surprise to members of this Assembly that a majority of Albertans do not support the federal government's child care plan. As the federal NDP's child care critic, Olivia Chow, pointed out yesterday, most families will only see a fraction of the promised amount. Through taxes and clawbacks many Ontario families will see only \$200 per year. It isn't even enough to buy a year's supply of diapers, Mr. Speaker. Research I have already outlined in this Assembly paints a comparable picture for Alberta families.

So once again I'm calling on the Minister of Children's Services unequivocally to defend last year's child care agreements and the principles underlying them and urge Ottawa not to dismantle the program. Should that fail, I urge the minister to continue funding to enhance programs that most Albertans and Alberta families would like to stay in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

2:40

Criminal Sentencing Guidelines

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our justice system is based on fundamental principles of law: fairness, presumption of innocence, and independence of the judiciary from any political interference. These principles have withstood the test of time. However, there is yet another principle which at this time appears to be questioned; that is, public confidence in the justice system.

As you may recall, some two months ago residents of Edmonton reacted to a highly publicized criminal case by gathering some 5,000 signatures on a petition requesting a thorough review of the sentencing guidelines and rules for parole order dispensation. Again last week residents of Edmonton presented this Assembly with some 20,000 signatures petitioning and requesting the same.

Mr. Speaker, even though individual cases ought not be affected or decided based on petitions or lobby efforts, it is evident that our constituents demand that our justice system undergo a thorough examination. As one constituent pointed out to me, the system ought to be a justice system and not a legal system. Having said this, I urge our Justice minister to continue to collaborate with his provincial, territorial, and federal counterparts in his effort to review parole guidelines and sentencing trends. As elected politicians we must seriously consider entrenching minimum sentences in laws passed in this Assembly and in Ottawa.

Thank you.

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

Water Management

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government's Water for Life strategy outlines some important initiatives that I believe require the government's urgent attention. Water is a resource that is often taken for granted. Just like our abundant oil and gas resources the water which sustains all of our communities and our industries in Alberta simply cannot be relied upon without significant long-range planning and wise infrastructure investments.

Our efforts in Alberta to address the challenges associated with water fall into two categories. First and foremost, we must ensure the safety of our drinking water, which must be protected by ongoing monitoring and investments in technology and infrastructure for water treatment and waste-water management on a regional basis throughout the province. Secondly, we absolutely must be concerned in the long term about the quantity of the water that is available to us. This is not simply a southern Alberta regional issue but an issue involving all Albertans in all corners of Alberta.

On the first point, about the safety and quality of our water, it is important that Alberta build upon the Water for Life strategy by enhancing it with an integrated water-use management program similar to the integrated land-use program that the Alberta government is planning. This would entail mapping out all of our water resources, including aquifers, and on a regional basis, ensuring that the current and planned usage levels are consistent and sustainable not only for today but for 10 or 20 years down the road.

With respect to the quantity of water Alberta cannot afford to simply wait and see if the dire predictions about the decline of our glacial water sources are borne out 10 to 15 years from now. We must begin to plan and act now to preserve water today rather than wait for scarcity to prompt us into action tomorrow.

Despite the abundant oil and gas resources that Alberta possesses, water is, in fact, our most precious resource. We must take bold

action today to ensure that we have safe and sustainable sources of water for our immediate needs and for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table two petitions. The first petition is from 17 students and staff of Grasmere school in Alberta Beach. The second petition is from 72 students from Harry Collinge high school in Hinton. Both petitions call for concerted government action to address the rise in teen smoking in Alberta.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition sponsored by the Friends of Medicare. This one has 1,007 signatures. It calls on the government to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms and for the Assembly to defeat any legislation that would allow the expansion of private hospitals or insurance or that allows doctors to work both in the private and public systems and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by 23 students and teachers of the Tilley school. This calls for concerted government action to address the reported rise in teenage smoking in Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 203 signatures on a petition urging the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement the third way health care reforms.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A further 202 signatures from communities such as Edmonton, Calgary, Sherwood Park, De Winton, Cowley, Lethbridge, St. Albert, and so on, urging the government not to proceed with the third-way health care reforms.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition sponsored by the Friends of Medicare. This one has 600 signatures. It calls on the government to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms and for the Assembly to defeat any legislation that would allow the expansion of private hospitals or insurance or that allows doctors to work in both the private and public systems and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two separate petitions. The first one is:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation allowing parents the authority to place their children into mandatory drug treatment and to fund urgently required youth drug treatment centres.

There are approximately 100 signatures on that one.

The other one is 200 signatures here where they urge the residents of Alberta to petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to abandon its implementation of the third-way health care reforms, oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act as well as vote against plans that would force Albertans to pay for private health care insurance for services that should be covered by medicare.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to present a petition from many residents of northeast Edmonton, including the constituency of Edmonton-Manning. It calls upon this Legislature to prohibit two-tier medicare.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition sponsored by the Friends of Medicare. This one has 407 signatures on it. It calls on the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement the third-way health care reforms and for the Assembly to defeat any legislation that would allow the expansion of private hospitals or insurance or that would allow doctors to work in both the private and the public systems and to oppose any action by the government of Alberta to contravene the Canada Health Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday, April 24, when the House resumes, I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 15 and 29.

I'm also giving notice that on Monday the 24th I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 26.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

2:50 **Bill Pr. 3**
Edmonton Community Foundation
Amendment Act, 2006

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, that being the Edmonton Community Foundation Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

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

**Bill Pr. 4
Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption
Amendment Act, 2006**

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 4, the Canada Olympic Park Property Tax Exemption Amendment Act, 2006.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a list of the speakers at the upcoming World Health Care Congress, which the minister of health will be attending. At the congress she will have the dubious privilege of hearing from so-called thought leaders, including representatives Susan Chambers from Wal-Mart and Michele Schneider of the Avon cosmetics company. The privatization brain trust will be topped off by an inspirational message from President George Bush.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A number of tablings again from concerned citizens. I'll start with a letter from Shannan Little, who believes the third way will increase waiting lists as doctors cherry-pick for the private practice.

From Joan Lewis, noting the conflict of interest and corruption she believes is being brought forward with this.

From Dennis Kaban, who notes that the government should "listen to the opposition members," they have some good ideas.

From Norma Farquharson, noting that Canada spends 9 per cent of its GDP on health, the U.S. spends 15 per cent, and millions of people aren't covered. Why would we emulate them?

From Clare and Tammy Irwin, who note "that positive results within the existing [public] system can be achieved and resources should be dedicated to the promotion of further similar programmes."

From the Very Reverend Fabian W. Hugh, who notes that in the province we have a great disparity between rich and poor, including the working poor, and is concerned that the third way would affect that.

From Harry Hoffman, believing that we are selling off our province and that profits from third-way privatization health care would leave the province.

From Shirley Harpham, noting that she and her husband have private health insurance through private providers, and they've had a great deal of difficulty with them and don't want to see that in the province.

From Horace Gopeesingh, believing the third way does not address the very crucial issues regarding shortages of personnel, expertise, and facilities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My tablings today are handwritten comments shared with me by Mr. Charles Edward Murphy, who refers to the suggested health care reforms as the third unknown way and says that this government needs to offer "clear,

concise, all-encompassing details of any plan" it is proposing before the government goes ahead with the usual Conservative way and jams it "down our throats."

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's the appropriate number of copies of the poll released by the Alberta Federation of Labour and Public Interest Alberta. This poll found that 50 per cent of Albertans opposed the Prime Minister's alternative plan to tear up agreements on child care and that 61 per cent of Albertans believe that even if the agreements are cancelled by the federal government, the Alberta government should nevertheless continue to fund those programs as they'll be enhanced this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one letter to table this afternoon. It's from the Minister of Community Development to cross-country skier Beckie Scott on her retirement. Beckie hails from Vermilion, in my constituency, and has been an inspiration for skiers not only in Alberta but in Canada and throughout the world. The letter praises Beckie for her many achievements, for her being a tremendous ambassador for Alberta and Canada and wishes her the best in her future endeavours.

Thank you.

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I would also note that I'd like to raise a point of order, but at this point, I will, following Standing Order 7(5), ask for the Government House Leader to share the projected government business for the week of April 24 to 27.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to do that. Our projected government House business would include the following. Starting on Monday, April 24, in the afternoon we'll deal with private members' business, that being some written questions and motions for returns. Under public bills and orders we will deal with second reading of bills 206, 207, and 208, time depending, of course.

On Monday evening, under private members' motions I anticipate that we'll deal with Motion 507. At 9 under Government Bills and Orders we will look at second reading of Bill 24, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 2006; Bill 29, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Amendment Act, 2006; Bill 30, the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Amendment Act, 2006; Bill 31, the Health Information Amendment Act, 2006; Bill 32, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act; Bill 33, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2006; and Bill 34, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2006; and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, April 25, in the afternoon under Committee of Supply we'll deal with the Ministry of Education estimates and otherwise as per the Order Paper. Tuesday at 8 p.m. in Committee of Supply we will deal with the Ministry of Gaming and its esti-

mates. Then in Committee of the Whole we anticipate dealing with bills 14, 15, 25, 26, 27, 28, and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday afternoon in Committee of Supply we will deal with the estimates of the Ministry of Community Development and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. in Committee of Supply we will deal with the estimates of the Ministry of Innovation and Science and then Committee of the Whole for bills 24, 29, and 30 and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

Thursday afternoon in Committee of Supply we will deal with the estimates of the Ministry of Health and Wellness and otherwise as per the Order Paper.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton Centre on a point of order.

Point of Order Tabling Cited Documents

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in the afternoon during question period in an exchange between the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation the minister quoted extensively from a document. I did wait until after tablings was complete to see if the minister had in fact tabled the documents from which he was citing, and I note that in *Beauchesne* 495(1), (2), (4), and (5), which I can go through in depth, but essentially:

495. (1) A Minister is not at liberty to read or quote from a despatch or other state paper not before the House without being prepared to lay it on the Table.

(2) It has been admitted that a document which has been cited ought to be laid upon the Table . . .

(4) Only the document cited need be tabled by a Minister . . .

(5) To be cited, a document must be quoted or specifically used to influence debate.

As I noted, the minister did quote extensively from the document and held it in his hand through an entire exchange and, I think, perhaps two exchanges with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

I did notify the Speaker at the time that I expected the document to be tabled given the amount of time that had been spent on it. As I say, I waited until the end of tablings to see if that document was forthcoming, and it has not been, Mr. Speaker. So at this time I argue that 495, and the many clauses I've cited, has been breached and would ask that a point of order is found against the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and that the document is produced and tabled in the House.

Thank you.

3:00

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else on the point of order? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I was just reviewing 495. I recall the incident that the hon. member is raising the point of order on; however, it's not clear to me whether or not the document that the minister was referring to and perhaps quoting from had already been tabled by him earlier. I think we need some clarity around that matter before this could be properly considered.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I anticipated this, so I looked into *Beauchesne's* as well and read from the same clauses that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out. I would like to point out specifically *Beauchesne's* 495(4), which says: "only the document cited need be tabled by a Minister. A complete file need not be tabled because one document in it has been cited." Not having the Blues before me, I don't recall him citing any specific document to

begin with or referring to it by name. If I could get some clarification on that, it would be helpful.

Not having that, does the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung wish to respond to this?

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation was reading at length from a document that he held up and he actually portrayed during question period. It's our submission that he needs to table this very document, and whether in fact it was tabled before or not is irrelevant. It was not tabled before in our opinion.

Mr. Horner: Well, Mr. Speaker, just perhaps to provide a little clarity or perhaps even to add to this discussion, it would appear to me, as I recall, not having the benefit of the Blues either, that the minister was extrapolating the acreages from the documents that had been tabled previously. Simply stating that from those documents and those agreements that have been tabled in this House, if one did the math, one would find where the acres were. He did make reference to Easter eggs as well, but we're talking about what he pointed to as opposed to a particular document cited.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else?

Mr. Shariff: Mr. Speaker, I do recall that when that interaction happened with the minister and on the question, there was an issue about the total number of acreages. The minister did indicate that if you look at that contract, the total acreage will be in that contract. My belief is that the document that he may have been referring to was the actual contract that was tabled on Tuesday.

Ms Blakeman: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I would not have raised this issue if I did not believe in all good faith that there was an additional document that was being read from and cited from and quoted from directly. It was a different shape. The offer to sale, the documents, contracts that were offered before are on a legal-size piece of paper. What the minister was holding in his hand and looking down at repeatedly and reading from extensively was not that same shape or size of paper, so I would ask that document that he was reading from please be tabled.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, not having a copy of the Blues in front of me, I will commit to the Assembly that I will undertake a review of the Blues, and if there was a specific document cited, then perhaps there's a reason to have it tabled. I don't have a recollection of that, so I will look at that and make a ruling on it when we come back.

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**

Children's Services

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 in the debate.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to move the Ministry of Children's Services business plan for 2006-2009, and our budget estimates for 2006-07.

Before I get started, I want to introduce the ministry staff who have accompanied me here today and are sitting in our members' gallery: assistant deputy minister of ministry support services, Steve MacDonald; assistant deputy minister of community strategies and support division, Niki Wosnack; senior financial officer, Shehnaz Hutchinson; manager of budget strategies, Darren Baptista; budget officer Riyaz Mukhi; visiting us for the first time, CEO for the east central Alberta child and family service authority, David Wilson; my executive assistant, Maureen Geres; my special adviser, Debbie Malloy; and staff from my office, Jeri Romaniuk and Elizabeth Day.

This is a very small representation of the thousands of staff who work in my department, our regional authorities, and our contracted agencies across the province. I commend all of these very passionate people who dedicate their lives to improving those of Alberta's children and families. Mr. Chair, a minister is only as successful as the people she works with, and I can say with confidence that my staff do a fantastic job each and every day, working on behalf of the children and families in this province.

At Children's Services our focus has certainly shifted. The Alberta response has become our way of doing business. It recognizes a range, a continuum of services that are necessary to achieve better outcomes for children and youth. With two new leading-edge pieces of legislation we've transformed our approach to dealing with the problems our children, youth, and families face. I'm referring to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. Today more than ever we concentrate on building strong families and communities.

Trends have changed. Priorities have changed. To reflect those changes, we must also change the way we spend our money. We now focus on a comprehensive system of community supports that promote a variety of care options to give children and youth safe, nurturing, and permanent homes. Fewer children are coming into the direct care of our government. We're providing more services sooner to families, Mr. Chair, and our outcomes are better.

With this year's budget we'll be able to continue building on our successes. In 2006-07 this government is investing a total of \$918.5 million towards children, youth, and families in Alberta. It has an increase of \$99.9 million from last year. It is a budget that we know will give us the ability to continue promoting the development and well-being of children, youth, and families, keeping children, youth, families safe and protected and promoting healthy communities for children, youth, and families.

Today I'd like to share some of the highlights of this year's budget with you. We're investing \$147 million in child care, \$91.6 million towards caring for children with disabilities, \$32.4 million towards the prevention of family violence, and \$17.1 million in resources that support parents in giving their children a healthy start in life.

A significant increase in this year's budget is due to the federal child care funding, which will remain in place until March 31, 2007. Our spending target for this year includes federal transfers of \$85.3 million for the early learning and child care initiative that the former federal government introduced last year. However, we have since been informed by the new federal government that this initiative will be cancelled after the '06-07 fiscal year. This decision by the federal government came too late in Alberta's budget process to determine the possible implications for Children's Services future spending plans. The figures for 2007-08 and 2008-09 each currently include \$117 million for the original federal funding, learning, and

child care initiative transfer, that will no longer be provided by the federal government.

3:10

It's important, Mr. Chair, to remember that this province had already invested \$70 million into child care funding before any news of federal funding last year. The federal funding simply allowed us to enhance and expand our existing provincial child care programs and services, and it's exciting to see such strong support for Alberta's five-point plan.

As you know, I met with the federal minister to explain our five-point plan and to advocate for that plan on behalf of Albertans. While we know that it's important for the new federal government to implement its \$1,200 a year program, we're working hard to find a win-win for our children and families. Mr. Chair, I will continue to advocate on behalf of children, family, and child care providers in this province to identify the funding that will ensure quality, choice, and flexibility in child care. We know that at times it's hard for parents and families to carry the responsibility of raising a child on their own. We're committed to helping parents give their children the best start in life. Through a continuum of supports that promote effective parenting skills, knowledge, and healthy child development, we want to connect parents to the community services and resources that will help them get the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to build strong, healthy families.

This year we're spending \$17 million on parenting resources. It's an increase of nearly \$5 million to establish and operate nine new parenting centres, bringing our network of parenting centres to a total of 45 across the province. Here Alberta parents can access important services in early childhood development and care, parent education, family support, and information and referrals.

To help families meet the ongoing challenges of caring for a child with a disability, we'll invest an additional \$8.8 million. More and more children and families are accessing our support under the new Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. We want to build our successes by increasing our resources and expanding our services for children with disabilities, particularly those in rural and isolated areas of our province. Within this year's additional funding we'll direct \$1.3 million to enhance resources in the rural and isolated areas for respite resources, personal, behavioural, and developmental aide supports, and specialized services for children with severe disabilities. These services are important so we can keep supporting families who care for their children with disabilities at home and improve family functioning and child well-being.

The prevention of family violence and bullying is a priority not only for this ministry but the entire government. It's exciting to lead the cross-ministry strategy on the issue as we continue to move forward and take action. At Children's Services we can't forget that one of our core businesses is to keep families safe. In 2006-07 we'll invest \$32.4 million to support and protect those experiencing or at risk of suffering family violence. We want to make sure that all families in every part of the province at risk of violence have a safe place to stay when they need one. Yes, Mr. Chair, there are times when shelters are full, but let me make it very clear when I say that no one is ever sent away without help. Keeping families safe from family violence is the number one priority for every shelter across this province.

With our stakeholders we're taking action to make sure that shelters can continue to provide needed services, including an additional \$400,000 in funding to continue making emergency support and accommodations available. This additional funding means that Children's Services will provide \$21.8 million to women's shelters this year and will fund a total of 489 beds across the province.

A province-wide review of the women's emergency shelter program is currently under way. We're talking to women's shelter staff and Albertans who receive their services to make sure that we have the right services in the right places and at the right time. We also provide \$600,000 to support HomeFront in Calgary, a community agency dedicated to improving the way domestic violence cases are handled. It relies on a co-ordinated community approach to provide support and assistance to victims of domestic violence. HomeFront is truly working miracles, helping families to break the cycle of family violence.

With increasing advances in technology we face increased pressures to protect children and youth from sexual exploitation. You don't have to read very far in the newspaper to know what's happening. Just last month we heard about an international investigation into a child pornography website managed right here in Edmonton, trading images of child pornography and showing live webcasts of child rape.

Protecting children and youth from sexual exploitation continues to be a priority for our ministry. Spending in this important area has increased by \$1.1 million, or 21 per cent, since 2004-05. This year our budget shows a slight decrease in this area because of a one-time administrative cost for the program last year. This decrease has no impact on program delivery. In fact, we show an increase in the number of children we're serving through PCHIP, and we will be expanding our awareness programs.

Some of the most rewarding moments of this ministry are when we hear the success stories about young adults who were previously in our care. For many this successful transition to adulthood comes as a result of further education, something we make possible for them through the advancing futures bursary program. We provide financial support to children who have been or continue to be in our care to help them attain a degree or learn a trade through postsecondary apprenticeship or other training programs. By providing the youth in our care with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed, we can help them realize their dreams and ambitions, things they may have otherwise never imagined possible.

Since the program began, we've awarded 529 bursaries, but we could be doing so much more. We want to increase our uptake in this program so that we're reaching as many youth as possible. That's why this year we're providing an additional \$900,000, for a total of \$4.1 million, to the advancing futures bursary program. With this increase we hope to award over 500 bursaries in 2006-07 alone.

Family and community support services play a big role in Alberta. We're really proud of FCSS and all of the great things their programs are doing for communities across the province. No other province has a similar working partnership between the provincial government, municipalities, and Métis settlements. Our program is the envy of provinces across Canada and internationally, and we're thrilled to see that our FCSS communities continue to grow. Right now a total of 303 municipalities and Métis settlements are organized into 199 local FCSS programs. People province-wide can access the wealth of services provided through FCSS.

We want to make sure that FCSS programs continue doing the great things they do for Albertans. They will receive a \$3 million increase this year to provide for projected increases in the cost of delivering services and population growth across this province. Over the last five years FCSS grants have increased by 61.5 per cent. With this year's \$3 million increase we'll support FCSS programs across Alberta with a total of \$68 million in funding.

The key to accomplishing all of the great things I've told you about today is the work of our regional child and family services authorities. It's through our CFSA's that we are able to deliver

quality service for children, youth, and families across Alberta. This year they will receive \$650.9 million to do that: child intervention services, child and youth financial support, family support for children with disabilities, child care, early intervention, and other community-based services. This is almost \$40 million more than last year and represents 70.9 per cent of the total ministry budget.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to share with you some of the things we're doing this year at Children's Services. We're clearly committed to doing everything we can for Alberta's children, youth, and families. We've dedicated a total of \$433.8 million to promote their development and well-being, \$465.4 million to keep them safe and protected, and \$19.3 million to promote healthy communities in which they can live.

I'd now like to ask the MLA for Calgary-Hays, who is the chair of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, to please provide an update. Afterwards I am happy to try and answer any questions you have related to the Children's Services '06-07 budget, and I'll be pleased to provide answers in writing to any outstanding questions that I can't answer today. Thank you for your time.

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, the first hour is normally allocated between the minister and members of the opposition. However, there are six minutes left in the 20 minutes that is allocated to the minister. So, hon. member, Calgary-Hays, I'll recognize you for the next six minutes.

3:20

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister. There are approximately 1,700 facilities under the jurisdiction of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. The committee is currently reviewing a cross-section of facilities including daycares, out-of-school facilities, foster homes, child and youth social care facilities, and women's emergency shelters. At these facilities we are the eyes and the ears for the hon. Minister of Children's Services. When we conduct reviews, we interview service recipients such as children in care, their families and guardians, and service providers. We hear about the services provided and whether or not clients are satisfied. If there are any concerns about the quality of care at these facilities, our members flag them for follow-up by the appropriate authorities. Upon request from the hon. minister we also conduct investigations at facilities and where necessary provide recommendations to improve service delivery.

The committee has a seven-year visit plan to ensure that they conduct reviews in all regions on a rotating basis. This year we will conduct 225 reviews. Our members will visit facilities in southwest Alberta, northwest Alberta, northeast Alberta, Calgary and area, Edmonton and area, and the Métis settlements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's been 40 years since the creation of the first of the special sector ministries in Alberta. The Social Credit government of Ernest C. Manning created the ministry of youth at the same time it lowered the provincial voting age from 21 to 19. The first minister was the hon. Bob Clark, later Alberta's first Information and Privacy Commissioner.

About the same time, the federal government brought in a minister responsible for the status of women. Ottawa already had two special sector ministries responsible for veterans' affairs and for immigrants and immigration. Then some of the provinces added ministers responsible for seniors and finally for children's services. Women, children, youth, seniors, and veterans all represent sectors for which

government has certain responsibilities for persons who are or were vulnerable and have particular needs not being addressed in the mainstream at the time.

Though there may be a tendency to want to group women, youth, and children together, there is one significant difference. Children are one group who are not only vulnerable but who have no vote or voice in our political system. The first children for whom the province was responsible, long before there was a children's ministry, were a particularly vulnerable lot, those who had no families of their own and lived in foster homes, orphanages, and other institutions. Our responsibility to do something for them came not only from necessity because they had nowhere else to turn; it was part of the social conscience pioneered by churches and religious institutions and enjoined by the biblical reminder to tend the widow, plead for the fatherless.

Those included in today's Children's Services are still vulnerable and represent an even larger cross-section of society. We have not only the vital and emergent services for children who are wards of the Crown but issues and programs such as child care, and these are not frills but collective responsibilities, a result of the choices we have made and the economy we have built that requires most families to have more than one parent in the workforce in order to meet the costs of adequate food, clothing, and shelter. The phrase "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" is especially applicable to children, not only our own children but all children in our society.

Children bring us face to face with our own humanity. Our neglect of them in time and attention as well as in material needs reflects our neglect of human values. Giving due attention to children's needs, growth, and vulnerability involves far more than specific programs and institutions administered by the Ministry of Children's Services; it involves most ministries and practically all the major aspects of public policy, including environment, education, health, justice, recreation, and culture.

I would like to thank the hon. minister and her staff for the work they do in protecting our children. It is a challenge and a wonderful opportunity to seek to provide the best options and choices for Alberta families. I appreciate the opportunity I've had to participate in support of this ministry. I'm also grateful for the good working relationship we have established. It is an honour to speak about the budget and priorities for Children's Services, and I commend the ministry for many good initiatives and recognizing needs, new ones as well as old.

I want to talk first about an issue that is of primary importance in this province especially at this time, and that is child care. It is disappointing that the new federal government lacks long-term commitment to quality child care for children and families. The Speech from the Throne did not even mention quality care. There was no sense of direction for the country in terms of developing and nurturing the potential of young children and supporting their families. The new federal government plan for a direct payment to parents is shortsighted when the research so strongly supports investment in quality programs in the all-important early years. A small taxable allowance to parents guarantees nothing but a bit of extra cash to buy a service that may not be available in their community and has no guarantee of quality.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Our federal government is rushing to keep an election promise at the expense of dishonouring the important commitments already made to the provinces. So much work has already been done in communities across the country. Governments, early learning and child care organizations and leaders, parents and practitioners have

been working together for years to finally come up with a concrete action plan based on signed bilateral agreements to build quality child care across the country. Dismantling these child care deals is having serious consequences for the thousands of children on waiting lists.

The Canadian Child Care Federation is Canada's largest early learning and child care organization, a vibrant partnership of 21 provincial/territorial child care organizations representing over 11,500 members, including child care practitioners working in centres and family child care academics, parents, and policy-makers. CCCF is committed to excellence in early learning and child care through best and promising practices, capacity building and collaborations, networks and partnerships. It is their view that it is more urgent than ever that all government parties work together toward a vision that reflects the reality of today's family and the early learning needs of Canada's youngest citizens. What is needed is a deepened, lengthened, and permanent investment in early learning and child care in the coming budget.

Mr. Chairman, the greatest learning takes place in the earliest years of life. Here a child not only learns how to orient him or herself in the world but faces the basic question of value, whether he or she is loved and nurtured for what she is or what she does to satisfy others, whether she is central in other's attention and affection or somewhere on the periphery. On the basis of this, early education curriculum is structured and systems are put in place. Is it better spending to provide the initial supports in having a parent on-site at home or quality and qualified support if required than possibly spending huge amounts for remediation and therapy down the road?

There was a hope last year when the provincial governments and the federal government signed an agreement with the new commitments that the federal government was making with respect to children's services, daycare services in particular. The provinces would receive new funds, which they would then use in co-operation with each other to provide high-quality daycare services, quality that would be measured, and the services would be provided in daycare centres that are primarily there to provide quality services and not there to operate in order to primarily maximize their returns on their investment. In other words, these services will be funded adequately by two levels of government, federal and provincial. Secondly, these services would be universally available. Any expert that you talk to who has done work on child care or on early child development tells you that any money spent on quality child care and early childhood development and education is a return later on, so it's an investment worth making.

If we were to look at it purely from the point of view of economic returns – and I'm sure that all of us agree that there's more to it than just economic returns when you think about children – children's welfare is far more important than merely the economic returns. We know that 70 to 75 per cent of parents with very young children are participating in the labour force, and they have children that need care when they themselves are at work, and 70 to 75 per cent of the parents who are working want to have their children in daycares which are appropriately funded, are appropriately staffed, are safe places, and where children not only can be babysat but can in fact learn and engage in early childhood development programs, daycares that are not only properly funded but are staffed with people who are appropriately educated and trained.

3:30

A lack of funding has been the greatest problem faced by the child care sector in Alberta. The five-point plan established by Alberta addressed the concern by raising wages and accreditation funding for

daycare centres. The maximum income for families to receive full subsidy was increased by 25 per cent. More funding was given to provide opportunities for children with disabilities, and stay-at-home parents were provided a new subsidy, up to a hundred dollars per month for each preschool-aged child to participate in early childhood development programs. Along with this, supports for parents and the early intervention programs and services, including development and screening, have been improved.

I have some questions for the minister regarding child care. Has the minister made any progress in her discussion with her federal counterparts regarding Alberta's early learning and child care agreement that was signed with the previous federal government? I know that you told me there are some meetings coming up, but I'm wondering if you've had any further discussions since we talked. What plan does the minister have for the future of child care in Alberta if the previous agreement is really and truly eliminated in 2007? Given that the federal funding helped to increase child care wages in Alberta, will the minister commit to ensuring that these wages are not rolled back? Let's not go backwards. Let's go forward and keep the gains that we have made with the national daycare agreement.

In the business plan, page 97, strategies 1.3 and 1.4: can the minister commit today to ensuring that these enhancements to the child care accreditation program and training standards for child care professionals will proceed despite the change in Ottawa? I'm wondering: has the minister met with the provincial child care workers recently to hear their concerns? Child care workers need to be valued in this province. They need to be valued anywhere. There is no more important work than child care. Can the minister assure the child care sector that all of the gains that were realized in 2005 will not be lost? The results of a poll conducted by Public Interest Alberta were released today, indicating what we know, that the majority of Albertans oppose Prime Minister Harper's new child care plan and favour the previous federal agreement. Is the minister committed to protecting the interest of Albertans in this regard? Is she or will she be fighting to maintain the previous agreement with Ottawa?

As I continue talking about child care, I'd like to have you all look at out of school care because it is important too. This is an area that needs provincial support and subsidies and standards that match the expectations of daycare centres. Families need the support of the state, industry, and the rest of society. That's us. We need to provide the infrastructure, the money, and the moral and emotional support that can help young families do the work from which we will all benefit. The problem with after school care is that subsidies are needed for many families so that school-aged children will not have to be latchkey kids.

In Edmonton the city's program works well; however, parents in Sherwood Park cannot access subsidies for their school-aged children. Calgary has made it a priority, but it's a problem in many other areas. The only fair way to do it would be to have a province-wide program or have the municipalities all mandated to provide it. They get the money but choose to spend it in other ways.

In municipalities where out of school care is provided, it is done so through FCSS funding based on local decisions to allocate resources to out of school care. These municipalities, however, cannot meet the increasing demand for out of school care, and other municipalities simply cannot afford to offer the much-needed program. The patchwork provision of out of school care is ineffective and not nearly meeting increasing needs. Since Children's Services already monitors and licenses out of school care, why doesn't the ministry take over the program and provide adequate resources and supports to make it an effective program that truly

meets the needs of children and families in Alberta? As I understand it, out of school care is provided by the municipalities through their FCSS funding. I know that right now there's a really big advocacy effort to have this pushed into provincial responsibilities thereby freeing up some of the FCSS dollars for other initiatives. Can the minister tell us if this will be happening?

Another area of concern for me is related to youth shelters. Youth shelters have no source of stable funding other than grants that they get from year to year, and that is not enough. The province has announced a review of this, but why do we have to wait for a review when all the agencies have been asking for the same thing that horse racing gets, which is steady, sustainable funding from year to year? My understanding is that the funding is very piecemeal and their administrators end up spending a lot of time trying to figure out which different grant program to apply to this year and trying to get them up to the level of funding they need to operate. I know that many, many hours are spent with fundraising.

Does this government have a plan for youth shelters and how they are funded? What programs are going to be introduced to ensure that the workers and agencies that care for these children are going to have the stable funding required to provide that environment? I hear that there's a need to provide some funds, either through the Wild Rose Foundation or the Muttart Foundation, to bring the youth shelter managers together in meetings to talk about best practices and allow them to learn from each other. I think that this will be timely when the youth shelter review committee releases its report and recommendations, and I don't know when that's going to be. If shelter managers have a chance to come together once or twice a year, such as groups do that deal with safe communities or agriculture, it would go a long way in helping them to learn from each other about effectively using resources.

Another concern I have when I talk to shelter staff is that they express a concern about the lack of service providers and the lack of support the government shows for the marginalized people of this province. Yet again they mention the horse-racing industry getting the 40 per cent increase. This just doesn't make sense. Service provision industry workers such as youth workers, personal care workers are paid less than any other industry. The people that work in some shelters make the same amount now as those working at Tim Hortons. I don't think that's right. Our children are a precious resource, and they deserve the best we can give them. The lack of stable and predictable funding places a heavy toll on shelter staff to fund raise.

I know that we have youth in transition programs, services, and resources that Alberta's Children's Services provides or offers to youth between the ages of 18 and 22 who have intervention status or an agreement with the director. The goal is to ensure that these youth have a transition to independence plan. The plan addresses such things as their educational and career plans and life skills development. The plan must address the youth's living arrangements and identify family and community connections necessary to support the youth as he or she transitions into adulthood.

However, some shelters tell me that their fundraising provides some funds that allow them to assist work with teens that do not have child welfare status. This is another issue: youth without status who are homeless. Youth homelessness has been identified as a growing national issue by individual researchers, by the federal government's national homeless initiative, and on and on by countless service agencies who work with street-involved youth.

Identifying the complete, accurate number of kids on the street at any one time in Canada is a difficult thing, but the count right now coming from our national government is approximately one-third of the total homeless population, or about 60,000 per year. On any

given night data from the national homeless initiative states that approximately 11,000 youth are homeless. A report providing recommendations for the Calgary nonstatus homeless youth study tells us that a total of 186 youth were surveyed during the period of the study recently, and of those 102 fit within the parameters of their research focus. The conclusion was that it allowed them to produce a verifiable count of 354 individuals in Calgary under the age of 18 who do not have child welfare status and who have identified themselves as homeless.

3:40

Homeless youth are a heterogeneous population. They come from all quadrants of the city and the province. We need a provincial response to the issue of child and youth homelessness which would begin with the commitment of funding to resource community-based transitional housing programs and supports for children who do not have child welfare status. There's a pressing need to expand the number of available beds and the continuum of services available to this population. Addressing child and youth homelessness is a central prevention strategy in efforts to eradicate homelessness.

Looking again at youth shelters, besides predictable and sustainable funding, another issue is the need for qualified staff in our shelters. I am told that we need more on-call workers that can help with assessment and referral of youth. Staff at the shelters are generous and are good enough to know when they are not able to help, but there's often no one to call to give some help and guidance in casework. There's also no one to ask for help on behalf of youth. I can talk about cases I've heard of where there are kids in shelters who have lost a parent in a car crash or who are remembering sexual abuse from earlier years. The staff do not feel qualified to deal with this. That's just wrong. We must provide agencies with enough money to be able to provide services to youth that don't fit into the nuclear family unit. Can the minister tell us what level of funding will be dedicated specifically for youth emergency shelters in the province?

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thought the minister was going to respond first. Was the minister not going to respond?

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry. The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I truly do appreciate your support. I would like to touch on some of the areas that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods brought forward. Of course, her first issue is child care, and like she indicated in her speaking notes, we've had several discussions on that particular area.

She asked about the discussion with my federal counterparts. I believe the last time she was in my office I explained to her that when the minister was appointed to her cabinet position, I think it was less than 48 hours after that that we placed a call in to her in regard to the urgency of having some discussion on the child care initiative. From that we set up an appointment, and we flew to Ottawa and met with her and talked to her about the issue of child care, specifically on issues that we felt needed to be addressed. First of all, Alberta's five-point plan, which has been resoundingly successful and accepted by Albertans: we wanted to talk to her about the future funding of that particular initiative.

Besides that we had many, many other questions to talk to her about in regards to the creation of the child care spaces that they were talking about and the money that was involved in that particular initiative. We had asked her about the fact that: who was going

to do the monitoring? Who was going to do the licensing? All of those questions we felt needed to be answered. We came back from Ottawa and within a couple of days sent a letter back to her asking what I consider several pointed questions about the issue of child care, the issue of the creation of spaces that they talked about. I believe it was about 125,000. I can tell the hon. member that at this particular time, on the date of the 13th of April, we have not had a response from her. We are continually discussing the initiative of our child care program.

She asked the question about wages, if the wages were going to be rolled back on the enhancement that we have already provided to the daycare providers in this province, that do an unbelievable, remarkable job and are what I consider second parents to us when we drop our children off. The answer is no. We have no intention of rolling back their wages.

She asked me if I had met with the child care association. The answer is yes. I met with them a couple of weeks ago. I don't have the date in front of me, but there were several from all over the province. Since then we had a very long discussion. They indicated that they were going to go to a meeting, the national meeting, and discuss their views about how they felt about the initiative of the agreement from the federal government. We have since sent them a letter of support. They wanted to have something in writing because of all the questions that they're getting from parents, from child care providers, so we have sent a letter of support and indicated that they would then be posting that particular letter at daycares so that the parents could see that Alberta is supportive of our five-point plan.

The new polls. That's just what I talked about. I have not personally seen the polls other than what was shared just before I came into question period. I believe the poll results were incredibly high at 87 per cent support or something for the child care plan that we're doing here. When I was scrummed by the press, they asked me if I was surprised. I said no, because that plan was derived from Albertans. We consulted heavily, and we will continue to push our plan. I can recall when I met with the federal minister. She said that Alberta was leading the pack across this country because it was so innovative.

The hon. member then talked about out of school care. We have had this discussion in the past, and I indicated to her that we're reviewing. The FCSS program is now being reviewed by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon. When I was in the meeting with the child care association, they brought that up about the after school program, and I indicated to them that we're well aware of it. We're well aware of the discussions on the after school program, but we're still at this point in time lobbying to just continue to keep our own child care program. That's one of our priorities. I said that it's not a dead issue, but it's not something that's on the front burner for us at this particular time; it's on the back burner, by which I mean, you know, if you've got two on the front and two on the back. We're going to continue looking at that particular initiative.

The social care facility act the hon. member referred to is currently being reviewed by Calgary-Fort. I expect to have that in my office within the next couple of months, and we'll go over that.

She talked at length – and I know this is dear to her heart – about the youth shelters and the review. The question she asked is: why are we doing the review? Well, I can tell the member that when I travelled the province last summer, I crossed the province as far south as you can go and as far north as you can go and made it a point to try and drop in on every kind of sector within the jurisdiction that I had been visiting, so that would be child care, women's shelters, youth shelters. I listened to them quite intently, and it was interesting to me about the different issues in different areas of the province that they're particularly dealing with.

I felt it was important to review the youth shelters on how they are conducting business because some of the things in the discussions when we were visiting the youth shelters struck me as good issues; some of them alarmed me in some way. I thought it was important for me that we do a review. We support the concept of the youth shelters. We support children and youth in this province. We realize that there is a category of youth if you can label them – and I don't like to label people as high risk. We have youth that are in transition. We have youth that are travelling across the country and may access a youth shelter. We have some youth in there that are going through a crisis with their parent. We have some youth in there that prefer not to live at home. We have some youth that have some issues whether it's a death of a parent, that you alluded to, or some social problems. So for me it's a bigger picture on how we're going to deal with the youth emergency shelters.

3:50

Listening to the staff about some of the issues, for example, they feel that the kids should be out of the shelter from 8 to 5, and at that particular time they're looking for work, they're in school, or they may be at AADAC: one of those things. Some of the comments that I heard: on one particular day there may be a youth that may be in some sort of a crisis, maybe showing some suicidal tendencies, and things like that. Should they be out of the shelter because that's the shelter rule at that particular time? You may find a youth wanting to access a shelter at 3 o'clock in the morning because of some sort of crisis situation. I can tell the member that from some of the things that cross my desk on a daily basis there are a lot of not very good or happy kind of homes, where there are some horrific things happening.

I really think that it's important to have that review, see what happens in that review, listen to the people who are working in the youth shelters and hear what they have to say on some of the ideas on how we can move forward, some of the recommendations. I find the greatest way to get good ideas is listening to the people that are working on the front line. So that's why it was important for me to have a youth shelter review, talk to the people who are working in the shelters, talk to the kids and hear what they have to say.

You referred to wages. I can tell the hon. member that I believe it was a year ago – and I don't want to be quoted on exact dates – I gave \$12 million to the agencies because I was well aware of that particular level in regard to trying to keep their wages comparable to some of the government. That was met with applause, and they were very, very pleased about that. The agencies felt that it was a good start because the wages have been a problem, trying to keep their staff because of competition.

But the sad thing in reality at this particular time is the fact that when you have a very vibrant economy – we've got daycare workers in Fort McMurray, for example, that you could be paying \$15 an hour, and they can walk across the street and make \$30 an hour working in the kitchen. It's not just a problem within the Department of Children's Services. It's a problem everywhere across this province because you have a hot economy. I don't think there is a street that you can walk down in either Edmonton or Calgary where you don't see help wanted ads. The restaurant businesses are having problems. The retail businesses are having problems. One of the things that has kept the daycare kind of steady is the fact that we increased their wages in the five-point plan.

You brought up the youth in transition. I can't tell you how proud I am about that particular program. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, who is the chair of the Youth Secretariat, has done an unbelievable job in regard to moving forward some of the issues of youth across this province. Under his leadership, under the secretar-

iat and the work that he's been doing about consulting right across the province, we have put together the Youth Advisory Panel. I believe there are 15 members on there, and they're from all walks of life, from right across the province. I can tell the hon. member that they don't waste any words. They're frank. They're honest. They feel that they are being listened to. That's one of the concerns we've heard in the past, that the youth in this province don't feel that they're being listened to.

We're extremely pleased. We've heard what you've talked about, in fact, about our success with the youth in transition and our bursary program and about the youth who don't have child welfare status. It's something that we've heard and we're looking at. But I'm extremely proud of our youth bursaries and what's been happening with our students that are graduating. I never would've thought they would end up where they are. One thing that the member did ask is that she mentioned, under that program, living arrangements. Under our bursary we do provide living arrangements for those particular youth.

The last thing she talked about was the youth homelessness. I can tell the hon. member that I saw the review. I believe it was done in 2005. I met with a homelessness foundation out of Calgary. We talked at length about how you reach those youth, how you identify those youth. When the hon. member and I met, I said that I think one of the things that we need to improve in our department is education so that youth in the province know what is available to them not only from the department but other sectors across government as far as my hon. colleague that sits next to me, what's available in his portfolio, or what's available through Health.

I can tell the member that we've got two high-risk projects going on, and I spoke to you about that when we met. I'm looking forward to seeing how that's going because it's a pilot project. But we have sent the homeless foundation all of the information we think is pertinent in regard to accessing what we offer and getting the word out on the street more.

I think that's just about all of the questions she asked, Chair. If not, like I said at the beginning when I spoke, anything that I've missed, as we did last year, we'll provide back in writing.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to start with thanking the minister for her introductory remarks and for her continued expression of concern for the interests of children in this province. She indeed does have responsibility for a portfolio which I think provides the most critical services for the children of this province, so I take her words very seriously and take the policies of the department very seriously. They require our close scrutiny and, after that, support so long as we think that those policies are the right ones to provide the services that our children need.

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has already asked several of the questions, and the minister has tried to answer some of those, so I'll try to not repeat. I was looking at the business plan – is it? – of the government. Let me see if I can get there very quickly so that I get the exact title here. The fiscal plan is what I'm talking about. Under Children's Services on page 24 there is a reference to what the minister has already in a sense talked about briefly, that Alberta must "actively participate in negotiations with the new federal government regarding future federal funding" for child care and early learning and child development services.

I'm curious about this. I ask the minister – she says that she will actively participate in negotiations – is it the bilateral negotiations that the minister is referring to here between this province and the federal government, or is it all provinces together engaging the

federal government in some negotiations? If it's simply a bilateral matter, then it's not a question of just participating. I urge the minister to in fact say that she will engage the federal government in coming to some sort of conclusion on these negotiations that she has already started.

We can't lose time on this. We know that services for children not only in Alberta but all over Canada, particularly child care services, are one of the most undeveloped parts of our social and economic policy. Child care is deficient in supply, in the number of places available. It certainly raises very serious concerns about affordability of what is available, and certainly there are concerns about quality control. I think the minister's own five-point plan, that she released in October of last year, October 18, I think, if I'm right, acknowledges that action needs to be taken, that the government needs to come up with a concrete action plan to address some of these concerns and some of these deficiencies.

4:00

I applaud the minister for having developed that five-point plan, which certainly indicates an attempt to seriously address the question of quality, wages for people who work in the field, and their professional development as well as accrediting more and more of the child care facilities so that they meet standards. I notice that the minister acknowledges that these are problems, and she has by way of a five-point plan indicated that she's willing to take action.

That five-year plan related action, Mr. Chairman, was facilitated by the signing of the agreement by this minister with the federal government prior to the last federal election, which resulted in the province of Alberta getting a large amount of money. The minister will tell me exactly: \$117 million a year, I think the minister noted, from federal transfers in this regard. As part of that plan I think it's certainly more than \$70 million. Those new additional funds made it possible for the minister to take some initiatives that have received the support of, well, the vast majority of Albertans.

Today's poll that was released by Public Interest Alberta and the Alberta Federation of Labour shows both support for the federal/provincial agreement that our minister signed on behalf of us and the children of Alberta with the federal government last year and also support for the actions that the minister proposes to take in order beef up the quality of the child care services in this province and move them in the direction of more than just babysitting to beginning to focus on early childhood development, which is, by any measure – whether you look at the work of experts on child care, whether you look at the work of educational experts, all say that those early years are extremely critical and significant for the later developmental success of our children through school on to the labour market and society in general.

What I'm trying to do is to on the one hand compliment the minister for using the additional funds to do exactly what needed to be done. Now that those funds are in jeopardy, the minister cannot assure this House that those additional funds from the federal government for this purpose will be available. It looks like they won't be. So then my question to the minister is: what are the plans that she has in place to replace the loss of those dollars that would have come to us from the federal government had the agreement that she signed been honoured by the government that succeeded the previous government?

If the minister is – and I know she's serious about this. She says that she's negotiating with the federal minister, but the federal minister told her, it seems to me, and the minister has just said, that those funds are not likely to be forthcoming after this fiscal year. Then will the minister join with other provincial governments and with Albertans in this province to send a clear message to the federal government that the federal government must not cancel the

agreement over the next five years as was planned, that the minister signed, I guess, for the first two years? I would like to get the minister to address this issue as clearly as she can. Would she join publicly with other provincial governments to say to the federal government that she is advising the federal government not to cancel those programs and that that program was very, very valuable and they must be kept in place?

Secondly, will the minister, in fact, if she needs help from this House, bring forward a motion in this Assembly seeking the support of all parties represented in this House for her support for that agreement and for her ability to urge the federal government to respect and honour the agreement that Ottawa had signed with the provinces? I would certainly be willing to work with the minister in this House to get such a motion passed. If she would rather have this motion come from this side of the House, I'd be more than willing to take that initiative. I need the minister to address this issue head-on, say yes or no that she will in fact stand up for the children of Alberta on this issue regardless of who is in power in Ottawa.

What's really at issue is not the politics of this whole thing; what's at issue are the fundamental interests of our children. Those children, as the minister herself acknowledged by way of the five-point plan that she developed, are served best if that federal/provincial agreement that she was signatory to is honoured and respected and kept in place. That agreement is in danger. It will be gone if we don't speak out on this. So there's a need for us as a House, as a government, as a province to speak out on it and join our voice with the voices of those who want this agreement to be saved and properly funded.

The alternative Harper plan is simply not designed to address the issue of affordability, the issue of quality control, and the issue of availability of enough spaces. Supply side must be addressed. We need to create spaces in affordable, quality daycare places, where our very, very young children can get the services which will help to begin to learn the skills and engage in cognitive and social and personal development, which is critical to their education later on and to their success in life following that. So that's the question that I have for the minister.

The other questions: some of them are somewhat more specific. I notice that in the minister's budget there's a parenting resources initiative. If she would give us some information on that. There's quite a large increase, about 40 per cent, in that particular line item in the budget. I just want the minister to give us some information about where this money is going. I'm not opposed to it. It's a parenting resources initiative from \$12 million to \$17 million, so about a 40 per cent increase.

In the same vein there's a reduction in some protection of children from prostitution. There's a reduction in the budget, and I wonder if the minister would explain how she justifies that reduction. Is the exploitation of children through prostitution going down? Is it less of a problem today? What is it that explains the 6 per cent reduction in the monies available for this?

Mrs. Forsyth: I mentioned that in the speech, Raj.

Dr. Pannu: We need an explanation of it.

The second is the Child and Youth Advocate. There's, again, an 8 per cent cutback there, and we need to know why that is happening and what's the justification for the drawing of funds from advocacy. If anything, we have more children needing more and stronger advocacy. Why the reduction there?

4:10

The Children's Services 2003-2004 annual report, the department's own report, says that only about 55 per cent of assessed child

care facilities are found to be providing developmentally appropriate environments for children in their care. This is from page 42 of the department's own annual report. Now, with the possibility that the federal funds will disappear within a year, how will it impact the ability of the minister's department to improve this situation? Not all were assessed. Of child care facilities that were assessed, only 55 per cent were found to be providing developmentally appropriate environments. With the focus that the five-point plan of the minister shifts over to the developmental side of child care, are these deficiencies likely to stay in place or is the minister going to find funds elsewhere if her federal counterparts, in fact, withdraw from the agreement which would have provided a substantial amount of money to address these already existing deficiencies in the facilities that we have?

The issue of the caseloads of child care workers who intervene in difficult family situations or take care of children in government custody has been a major one. We know that caseloads have been increasing. As a result, the ability of social workers who do this very, very difficult work to provide the services on time, appropriately, and quality services has declined. Social workers have in fact been accused of failing in their duty to provide the most necessary and critical services. Would the minister please inform the House about how this budget addresses the issue of excessive and intolerable caseloads by social workers who provide these very critically important services to the minister? I was trying to find in the budget where I could see some attention paid to this specific problem, but it's very difficult in those numbers to really figure that out. The minister, I'm sure, knows the answers and would be in a position to provide some answers.

The last question that I have has to do with the Edmonton region child and family services authority and comparing it with Calgary. Calgary has a larger population, we have a smaller population, yet the budget for the Edmonton area child and family services authority is perhaps 50 per cent more. I'm just curious about what explains this. I have no specific questions, but it did pique my curiosity about why this huge difference in spite of the fact that the Calgary region has a larger population to look after than Edmonton area. Maybe it's the demographics of the two cities. Maybe it's the composition of the population, diversity of it, whether it's the income levels. I don't know what it is, but maybe the minister can respond to those.

An Hon. Member: It's a combination.

Dr. Pannu: Well, let's see what the minister knows and what she's willing to share with us on this.

So with these questions, Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down, and I'll look forward to the minister addressing some of these questions. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate having the time to respond to the hon. member. Again, we're going to go back to the child care issue. I guess that, if I may, I'm going to take the hon. member back in time to when the previous minister, who is the minister of health, started the negotiation with the federal government. At that particular time when she was negotiating, they were negotiating on what they call a quad principle. They had an agreement from all the provinces at that time, accepting a quad principle right across the country.

Following that, we had an election. We also had a change in cabinet. I ended up becoming the Minister of Children's Services so was honoured enough to go to my first federal/provincial/territorial

meeting. Now I believe we're going back to about January of '05. The minister at that particular time, Minister Dryden, came into the meeting where all the provinces and territories were sitting and more or less said: this is the agreement that we're all going to sign. I guess it was a national agreement if you can say that. It was an agreement that was supposed to fit all provinces.

If the member recalls, I was painted at that particular time – and I believe it was the minister from Quebec – the black sheep for taking the national child care program off the rails and not getting an agreement right across the provinces and territories on that. I made it very clear to the minister at that time that what Alberta wanted was what was best for Albertans and that the agreement that we would be signing would be in consultation with Albertans on how Albertans wanted us to come up with a plan. Thus far, you see the five-point plan.

What I must remind the hon. member is that even prior to that agreement being signed, we've always had regulated, quality child care in this province. It didn't just come up a year ago that we all of a sudden have regulated, quality child care. It's always been a priority of the government to have regulated, quality child care in this province. In the accreditation program that we have since brought forward over the last, I believe, 18 months, 97 per cent of the child care or daycare providers in this province have been signed up to become accredited. That takes child care one step further, and it provides additional training and gives them incentives in regard to accreditation.

I don't know how much more clear I have to make it to this member. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods knows our support for the child care agreement and what we signed on the five-point plan. I told the hon. member that I had met with – and the name eludes me at this point in time. I believe it's the Alberta child care association. There were probably 15 or 20 of their members from across the province at the meeting I had with them. We talked about several issues, strategies to move Alberta's five-point plan forward. I wrote them a letter of support. I said: pass this on, that Alberta is supportive of the five-point plan. They went to a national meeting. So Alberta's support on the child care is something that is even at their national level.

I would encourage the hon. member, as I did the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, as a child care critic to write the federal government with your support. They need to understand. We have also said to our critics and to every letter that crosses our desk, which are many, in regard to the cancellation of our child care agreement: you need to let the federal government know. It is they that are cancelling the program. We had \$70 million last year. We have \$66 million this year. They then planned to stop our agreement. The third year would have brought us, I believe, about \$117 million and then four and five.

So it's important that if this is an issue not only for the government but for the opposition, they need to make that known to the federal government. We will continue to advocate on behalf of the children, families, and providers in this province. You know, I have to say that – all bragging aside, because this was not a plan that the minister made; it was a plan that was based on what Albertans want, and it's a good plan – it's probably the most innovative plan across this country dealing with the issue of child care.

4:20

I think the other thing that's important to discuss when we talk about child care is the platform that the Harper government brought forward on child care. It was \$1,200 per year for every child under the age of six, I think it was. A hundred dollars a month, which, times 12, works out to \$1,200. They also alluded to the fact of

dealing with, I think, somewhere between 125,000 and 145,000 daycare spaces. They were going to collaborate with businesses. Small businesses, big businesses: they were going to provide an incentive of \$10,000 to that business to create daycare spaces. Well, you have a lot of questions to ask about that particular. Is that \$10,000 a year? For every business that starts opening up a daycare, there are operating dollars that to need to be followed after that. Who's going to monitor them? Who's going to pay for the monitoring? Who's going to pay for the licensing? Who's going to pay for the accreditation?

Now, do you really think, if you've got a small town in Alberta, that you're going to be able to open up a daycare? I think that's a nice thing about the Alberta plan. We have the kin child care program, where if you're in a rural area or a remote area and you don't have access to a daycare, we will pay grandma or grandpa money if mom and dad have to go to work.

So there are many, many questions on the discussion of daycare spaces. There are more questions, I think, in regard to the pinch other provinces are feeling across this country in regard to daycare. For example, Ontario's deal was the fact that all the money they got, they directly handed down to the municipalities for the municipalities to make the decisions on daycare. Every province across this country that has taken their money has decided what they're going to do with it, so it's a problem.

I want to just say one thing. I have to remind members of the House that the Harper government won every seat in this province. They won every seat in this province on their five points, where they talked about accountability; they talked about child care. Some of the other things they had in their platform escape me right now, but that was accepted by Albertans. What I think the problem is on that, in talking to Albertans, is that they thought they were going to get both. So I think that's a message that we have said to the hon. federal minister, and we'll continue talking to them.

You asked about the increase in budget on – I believe it was a line item, but it escapes me.

Dr. Pannu: It's the parenting resources.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you. That increase is going to nine more parent link centres this year. Some money is to go for training tools, resources, and other supports to the parent link centres, accreditation to the parent link centres, and home visitation, et cetera.

You talked about – and I did speak about this, hon. member, in regard to the reduction on sexual exploitation. I talked about \$500,000 of that being for one time to update their computer systems, as is the child advocate IT development. Neither of those dollars will have any effect on the delivery of services. We wanted to get their computer systems and all of that up to snuff. So the decrease has no impact on funding to the Child and Youth Advocate's day-to-day operations. What the new system does – that was the one time – is allow the advocate to meet the requirements for his information collecting and case management requirements, the ability to manage the program.

You talked about caseworkers and the caseloads. I can tell the hon. member that we're developing a new casework practice model. It's actually quite exciting. It's a model that is being developed with staff, with the regions, and of course through work with the ministry, but a great deal of it is in consultation with the staff, on how to deliver services better. Paperwork is a problem with caseworkers, the enormous amount of paperwork. We heard that when we were travelling the province since we brought in the new act, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. We're looking forward to seeing that model come up to my desk and looking at that.

The Edmonton region. I can tell the hon. member that we have had unbelievable co-operation from all the regions in this province

in regard to what's working in their area, what isn't working in their area, how to make things work better, sharing their successes. Their budgets were developed from the regions. So the regions were the ones that developed their budgets in consultation with the people that are working in the field. It was very exciting to see the regions get together and, you know, look at their budgets and develop their particular budgets on the needs of the people that they're trying to serve.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to just take a few minutes again on child care, daycare although there are so many other important areas under your ministry that we need to discuss. I, too, will support any action that we can take as a government in Alberta to let Ottawa know that Albertans want and expect continuation of the national daycare agreement. I do have a plan to write a letter and a plan to send the hundreds of letters I have received to Prime Minister Harper, who needs to remember that he has a minority government and that he is accountable to all Canadians. So I support what you were saying, Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and, of course, our hon. minister.

Going on to other areas. We know that the welfare of children is strongly linked to the nonoffending parent's safety and emotional well-being. We need to pay some attention, I guess, to the need for secure shelters for women who are abused. These places must be safe. Often women believe from experience that they are not safe anywhere because they will be found. I reviewed the Alberta shelter statistics from 2002, information from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, and it's just appalling. I won't go through all the numbers, but one number that bothered me so much was the number of children turned away that year: 9,017. This is a tragedy. What part of the Children's Services budget addresses this tremendous need? What do we need to do to ensure safety and security for women such as these and their families?

Another area I'm concerned about is the need for detoxification help and rehabilitation for children who have been abusing drugs and who are addicted. Many times we have youth in the shelters that need to detox and need to talk to an addictions counsellor, but the counsellors are booked up for weeks, and often there's no room at the detox beds for these youth. I've talked with lots of parents who've expressed frustration, a sense of hopelessness because of the valuable time they lose trying to get their children into the system to get help. Bill 202, that was passed last year, was a step in the right direction, but there are real concerns about accessing treatment and then the transition period after treatment. What do we have in place to evaluate the results of what we stated in Bill 202 and to assess the effectiveness of detaining youth with addiction problems?

I'm aware of three addiction treatment programs in the Edmonton region. AADAC has four voluntary detox beds and eight treatment beds at the Yellowhead Youth Centre in Edmonton, and those beds, of course, are accessible through AADAC. Chimo Youth Retreat Centre is a not-for-profit agency and has a six-bed voluntary addictions treatment program in Edmonton, operated under a funding arrangement with Children's Services and AADAC. Bosco Homes operates a 12-bed drug addictions program in Parkland county on a fee-for-services basis accessed by various Alberta child welfare authorities and other health and social services authorities from outside of Alberta.

4:30

Every community in the greater Edmonton area has community initiatives advocating for more comprehensive youth addictions

treatment services. My own constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods has had a number of town halls on this issue. Community newspapers and letters from schools and parents are irrefutable evidence as communities such as Leduc, Beaumont, Strathcona county, Fort Saskatchewan, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Parkland county, Devon, St. Albert, Drayton Valley, and Edson, and as I say, even my own constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods organize public information meetings in order to address the ever-growing drug menace stalking our kids.

Municipal and community leaders are concerned, and the demand for more and better addiction services across Alberta continues unabated. The meagre response of 24 voluntary treatment beds between Calgary and Edmonton cannot possibly address the obvious problems we are facing in combating addictions among our children and youth. A much broader coalition to combat this modern-day plague is needed.

AADAC does not have the experience of operating child and youth treatment programs. Many NGOs have operated treatment programs in Alberta for years, including drug and alcohol addiction services, yet they've been excluded in favour of the government-run AADAC monopoly. Is it not wise to get all possible stakeholders together to work on the addictions scourge? Many of the not-for-profit and charitable agencies have not only the expertise, the psychiatrists, the medical doctors, and staff trained in addiction treatment but also facilities, which the taxpayers do not have to pay to duplicate.

Addictions affect our communities, our families, our schools, our justice system, and our medical system. It might be useful to have a variety of addictions treatment providers if for no other reason than to discover best practices and cost efficiencies. These agencies are at a disadvantage because they cannot offer the same salaries and benefits as AADAC.

Agencies could operate programs and serve many more children, yet these agencies who have a range of strategies to deal with addictions, including teaching harm reduction and how to take care of oneself, are not getting the referrals. They have had good results, and they are accredited agencies. Why are we not involving them in our efforts to work with families coping with addiction?

Another important agency that promotes well-being for Albertans is FCSS, family and community support services. These are amazing people who have a terrifically challenging mandate. Under the FCSS Act and regulations, FCSS does not focus solely on children and families at risk. It is a universal program for all community residents. I know that we have three centres in Edmonton-Mill Woods, and I am very proud of the work they do. As such, FCSS collaborates at the local, regional, and provincial level with a wide range of government and nongovernment service providers to address the needs of the entire community. I'm very happy to see that Children's Services has increased the funding for this particular initiative. I wonder if the minister could provide us with some details of how this increase in funding will be used.

[Mr. Rodney in the chair]

In the budget press release it states that this additional money will be used to "expand services, particularly for . . . rural and isolated areas of our province." Can the minister tell us which communities specifically are being targeted? Can the minister tell us exactly how this money will be used to expand services? Estimates page 70, line 2.0.3, the family and community support services estimate is \$68.2 million, an increase of approximately 4 per cent from the 2005-06 budget. I know that FCSS is very happy with this increase in their funding; however, I was disappointed to see that this year's increase was less than 5 per cent.

Among the programs that are funded by FCSS are those that support homeless families moving into stable housing and prevention programs that assist families in staying housed. This is a tremendous challenge because of the number of homeless in this province. FCSS is a crucial organization that helps to improve Alberta's social infrastructure. I think a more significant financial commitment from this government would help to improve the already incredible preventive social service network that FCSS supports throughout the province. Can the minister tell us what the future holds for this important program?

In regard to the current FCSS program review, does the ministry intend to consider the additional comments section that is included in the review, and if so, will there be more money for projects to address them? We understand that the FCSS program review is not touching on the financial growth of FCSS. While funding increases about 2.7 per cent a year on average, what is the minister's commitment to significantly increasing the FCSS program budget to better support and improve, I would say, this program, which is much loved?

I also have a few questions about Alberta's promise. This initiative was established in April 2003 through an act of this Legislature. It is designed to encourage all sectors of the community to direct more resources to benefit our children and youth. I quote from the Alberta's Promise Partners' Report 2003.

Alberta's Promise's role is to facilitate partnerships between communities, businesses, foundations, service clubs and not-for-profit agencies, who together share the vision of making Alberta the best place in the world to raise children.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I have some questions about this initiative and its funding. Many communities already have well-established and effective networks for communication and partnerships with each other and with the private sector. It seems that the accountability of the Alberta's promise initiative may result in increased demand on human and financial resources with very little benefit over what is already happening in the communities. I'm wondering if the provincial funds dedicated to the promotion of this initiative could otherwise have been redirected to community agencies that are already there for direct service. Given that Alberta's promise is not involved in fund development nor does Alberta's promise deliver programs to children and youth, why has the minister chosen to increase funding for this initiative at the expense of others?

I also want to talk about the wonderful work of foster parents in this province. These people are a precious resource that must be regarded with respect and support. I'm concerned that the move to place many of these homes under agencies is at the expense of the foster families. Can you explain the apparent difference in funds given to foster families for children that they have that are in the same categories of needs as compared to the funds that are given to agencies for those children?

One other question that I have goes back to that controversial quota system for the adoption of children in the ministry's care. You stated that it was in fact a performance measure. I'm wondering if you can explain why this performance measure is not included in the business plan?

You know, as I talk with constituents and stakeholders throughout the province, I am disturbed by a common theme of fear. People are afraid to talk because of their concern about action that may be taken against them individually or against the agency they represent. They are concerned about repercussions. I know this because they tell me this. This is Alberta, the richest province, probably the richest land

on Earth in terms of resources and material wealth, yet we have many who live in poverty, many who are dependent on the government for supports through no fault of their own. When they or their advocates ask for help, they should be treated with respect and dignity.

I have visited a number of facilities and talked with many individuals who are reluctant to stand up for what is right because they are afraid. Constituents have told me that they have been warned not to complain. One said that they had difficulty with an appeal and were given a few reasons. One reason was that they had spoken to an MLA about concerns. I'm not sure which MLA. These are people who are doing their best to live a quality life, some who are helping others meet their potential, and people who contribute to our province, to their province, in ways other than the material, yet they do not feel supported. They do not have confidence that they are appreciated or that they matter. I know that this is not your intention, but it is a sad commentary and an indicator that we must do better.

Thank you.

4:40

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you. The questions from the opposition critic from Edmonton-Mill Woods are always very pointed, and I appreciate having the opportunity to answer some of them. Of course, I won't be able to answer all of them. I have staff, like I indicated at the beginning of the deliberation, that would get back to you.

The hon. member started talking about family violence. I can tell her that the issue of family violence and bullying, because I think they go together, is probably one of the number one priorities, that started with this government from a horrific murder/suicide in Red Deer and even before that very, very tragic case. At that particular time the Premier put together a round-table on family violence, and without a doubt it's probably one of the most successful cross-government ministries in government. We have so many departments involved on that initiative from Aboriginal Affairs, us, Community Development, Education, Health, Human Resources, Justice, Seniors, the Solicitor General, and more and more as you keep widening it. We keep trying to keep ahead of it.

This year we are giving \$32.4 million to the issue of family violence, which is an increase from last year's budget. You mentioned some stats that you referred to in regard to the turnaways. That's one of the things I thought that it was important to do a review of in women's shelters because turnaways for one shelter can be different from another shelter. I'd like to give you an example of how loosely or how difficult the term turnaways can be used. You could have a woman that is leaving an abusive situation, and she might hit shelter 1 in Calgary, and it's full. Then they will place a call, and they may try shelter 2, and it's full. Then they finally find a home for her in shelter 3. Well, each one of those is considered a turnaway when what we should be counting is if some person is completely turned away with no shelter facilities at all. I think numbers have to be done properly. I don't think double counting is something that should be considered as a turnaway. We know that there's a problem, but as I indicated in my speaking notes, no woman, or man, for that matter, is ever turned away if they're leaving a situation that is serious. If it happens that a shelter is full, we will find them other accommodation. This is very, very simple.

Then you talked about the safety issues. I visited many, many shelters over my visits last summer, and it's amazing the jobs that these people do in these shelters under very difficult situations. In

fact, one of the shelters we visited last summer was in a red alert, which means there was not only a threat to the woman who was in that particular shelter, there was a threat to the people who were working in the shelter. Obviously, the shelter went into a red alert. Very, very secure. The chances of somebody getting in are – nothing in life is impossible – nearly impossible.

What was amazing to me was how the shelter continued doing their business. The police were there just like that, ready to respond. They were well aware of the situation, and in seconds they were at the shelter making sure that the people within the shelter were safe. The abuser at that particular time – they were aware of the licence plate, all of those things – would be obviously taken away as soon as he entered the shelter.

One of the things that was innovative under our new child care program was to be able to provide some daycare resources within the shelter for when the children were visiting because three weeks – sometimes the women are in the shelter 21 days – can be a very, very difficult time. They were very, very excited about that.

Justice has initiated a new program, and we'll get more information about it. I'm not sure, but I think it's called ARTAMI, an Alberta response team in regard to high-risk people – I've got to stay away from the women and men scenario because we're seeing some numbers going up in regard to men who are being abused – so that they have a response when they know that an abuser is at a high risk and could cause some serious damage. It was very, very innovative.

The world family violence conference that we held last October was an unbelievable experience for me, over 1,100 participants from 31 countries. We had people from Dubai. They wanted to see our shelters. After they spent time touring some of the shelters, they went home, back to their country, and announced 30-plus shelters that they were opening in the country of Dubai, which is amazing. We gathered a lot of knowledge, learned a lot of things from that world family violence conference because you've got people from all over the world. I'm looking forward to reading the final report and then, obviously, sending it to the people that participated at the world family violence conference.

It was important for us at that particular time to encourage another country to hold it because it was an unbelievable learning experience. We thought about how you can continue the process. It's not just a community or provincial responsibility. It's an issue that's affected world-wide. We learned some amazing things at the world family violence conference, whether it's same-sex abuse; child abuse, obviously; family violence abuse. It goes on to some of the countries that are dealing with some horrific things in regard to abuse. So I'm looking forward to that report.

You spent a lot of time talking about addictions. The addictions portfolio obviously comes under the minister of health. I can tell you that we have worked together on a cross-government ministry. The Member for Red Deer-North has been very innovative, and you alluded to her piece of legislation in regard to treatment centres. I don't want to speak on behalf of the minister of health, but I believe they opened up 12 beds at Enviro base camp and 12 beds in Edmonton to deal with addiction. I can tell you that under our Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act we're having incredible success at an early intervention level, getting to the families early instead of when they come to us at a protective state, where all of a sudden we're apprehending. Our caseworkers, who again I have to say do an incredible job in this province, will work with them, try and get the families into addictions counselling. If we have a child – and we do have children that are addicted to drugs and alcohol – we try and get them counselling. I mean, it's no different than what we do when a child has a mental illness.

The Premier's wife obviously has got her meth task force. We brought forth the Drug-endangered Children Act, that you were very,

very supportive of, where we're apprehending children out of drug-endangered houses. I can tell the hon. member that at least once a week we're apprehending children out of homes where there is drug involvement and under some horrific, horrific conditions.

You talked about the FCSS funding and the future. I know that you're bright enough to see that there's been an increase within the budget of FCSS, and they were pleased. The Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon, as I explained to you earlier, is doing a review. We support the FCSS. It's the only one in Canada. It's recognized not only right across this country but internationally, and we'll continue to support that. What's important for me is for the Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon to look at where we are on that particular initiative, where we are now, and where we're going to go.

I want to have it on record at this particular time because we've had calls from people that are concerned that they're going to lose the FCSS funding because of the review. I'm going to have it on record. We have written letters, and I met this week with Joe Ceci, the alderman, and he said: Minister, I know that we've got this letter, but there's still that uneasiness. We are going to be continuing the FCSS. So it's on record. The review has nothing to do with cancelling FCSS. It's how we can improve it and how we're going to deal with it in the future.

4:50

You talked about Alberta's Promise. Alberta's Promise was founded on the belief that it takes an entire community to raise a child, not only the government or the charitable sector or the private sector, to have a role in children's development. It is a wonderful organization that several years ago was Bill 1. We're getting rave reviews.

The increase in Alberta Promise's budget was for a media blitz so that every person in Alberta knows about Alberta's Promise and makes a commitment on behalf of the children and youth in this province. So companies, municipalities, agencies commit themselves to providing the children and youth in this province a better life, and they're having wonderful success. I've challenged them to a big challenge, and sometimes when you're setting goals, they have to be realistic, and I don't know if this is a realistic goal: at the end of this year to have every Albertan in this province know about Alberta's Promise and what they do and their commitment to the children and youth in this province.

A foster parent question, and I apologize, I wasn't quite sure about where you were going with that particular question, and it's difficult for me to answer when I really am not understanding. It's going to be in *Hansard*, obviously. We will certainly give you an answer to your question. I can tell you that we value all the foster parents in this province. They do a remarkable job with the children in their care, and we appreciate everything they do and continue to dialogue with the Foster Parent Association in regard to the issues that they seem to be facing. We negotiated a raise for them last year, and we'll continue with those negotiations.

Two more things. You talked about: why were the adoption quotas, I think it was, not in our business plan? Because we keep it in our annual report as a performance measure. While there has been some criticism on performance measures in this government, especially on the issue of adoption, that's a performance measure only. It is a priority for this government to get children who are in care into safe and caring and loving homes. Every caseworker in this province knows – and it's a priority not only for them – to get children out of foster care and into an adoptive home.

A few years ago there was so much criticism about the adoption website and that we were advertising children. I can only tell you the incredible success that we have had on that website in regard to parents who are looking to adopt a child. The hits on that site and

the adoptions that have been done just from that adoption site are probably more than anybody every dreamed was possible. So while we have it in our measures, there was never any financial – no one was penalized.

Managers within the regions get bonuses on their performance measures, but it's not just based on adoption; it's based on a whole bunch of performance measures. Just because they didn't happen to meet their adoption performance doesn't mean that they get slapped on the hand and they're not rewarded. Their performance measures are done like many, many managers within government and many managers in the private sector. They have performance measures that go through a wide perspective on making those agreements. I believe I answered that question in the House, so that will be in *Hansard*.

The last thing the hon. member talked about was repercussions. I was listening intently, but I wasn't quite sure if she was talking about staff feeling that there would be repercussions to them if they came forward with an issue or if it was agencies. I can only tell you that under this ministry no staff or agency will face any repercussions if they have a problem and they feel that they need to be heard. I can tell you that the CEOs and the co-chairs in the regions across this province are dedicated to the issue of children, youth, and families in this province, and they want to hear if there is an issue. They want to hear from both sides, whether it's the family that's being served or the person that's trying to serve that particular family. I can tell you on record that no agency or staff will face any repercussions if they bring an issue forward either to our staff or the regions.

I think I've covered just about everything. Again, if I haven't, I'd be more than pleased to answer more.

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

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak specifically to the important Ministry of Children's Services. Under the business plan on page 94 there are a number of initiatives – intervening early, family violence and protection of children, impacts of substance abuse, child sexual exploitation, the importance of the early years, aboriginal children, and the impact of prosperity, but I'll hone in on the child sexual exploitation.

Under the heading it states that

sexual exploitation of children is a global issue that impacts a vulnerable sector of society. Incidents of child pornography, internet luring and the involvement of youth in prostitution are increasing as communications technology has made access to children and youth by perpetrators much easier.

This is really quite disturbing.

We have loose laws that allow people – maybe their intent wasn't quite there – to get off on a technicality. We have lax laws that need to be tightened up. I'd like to see this minister actually challenge and take the lead on that. Specifically, when we're talking about youth being involved in drugs, drug houses, or being used as mules just for the point of being able to get into the schools as well as being able to use them later on in prostitution because they are now dependent on it as well, and I mentioned the fact about internet luring. There must be minimum standards, minimum sentences that should be implemented within the courts. It's got to be initiated by this ministry working in collaboration with Justice. That would be one specific benchmark that I would measure which would be a huge success. Absolutely.

Is the prevention of sexual exploitation of children still a priority for this government, and if so, why are you reducing some of the funds for this initiative? [interjection] Okay. Well, I'm just getting it on the record, then, for you. Has the initiative taken a back seat to

other new initiatives? If so, can the minister tell us what initiatives will benefit from this reduction of funds? On one hand, you recognize the increasing threat of sexual exploitation of children. On the other hand, you reduce the government funding to prevent such occurrences. I'm not sure where the ministry is going with that. Can you tell me the logic behind the reduction? Can the minister also tell me, in fact, who she consults with when they decide to do reductions in the budget for the important initiatives?

Going on to page 70 here, line item 1.0.4, corporate administration. It says that the estimates here are about \$13.7 million. Now, this looks like an increase of about 15 per cent from the 2005-2006 budget. This looks like it's an increase of nearly \$2 million. When we talk about the big scheme of things, \$2 million isn't a lot of money, but \$2 million in reality is a large amount of money. How exactly is this money being utilized under this initiative with the increase? Can the minister tell us why this increase was in fact necessary?

Going on to another page, page 75, the line item titled Other Revenue. The Ministry of Children's Services estimates that there is about \$9.2 million in other revenue. Can the minister tell us where other revenues will be generated?

5:00

In your business plan on page 95: "Aboriginal children have a higher representation in the Ministry child protection caseload than non-Aboriginal children. The result is higher costs and use of services for this population." I'm sure that the minister would, but I would like to hear it. Has she worked with other ministers such as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development? Clearly, there would be good cross-ministry involvement there.

There's a higher incidence of deaths on the reserves, and that also is alarming. I think that just last year there might have been 30. I don't know exactly. That's really quite sad when you think about it. You know, haven't even reached teenage years and there are already deaths.

The gangs out there are also a concern, but there is a new initiative to be able to bring the kids in and involve them in a group – it's not a gang – that the police are working with. I think that's great to be able to give them some identity instead of having their identity associated with gangs. So I would approve and applaud other initiatives like that working on the reserves.

Again, what initiatives is the minister pursuing to target the aboriginal needs? Given that aboriginal children have a higher representation in the ministry for child protection and caseload, why has the ministry not created a specific aboriginal program, created and directed specifically to address those aboriginal needs and issues?

I'll move a little bit towards some of the Auditor General's report. On page 129 the Auditor General's report of 2004-2005 recommended that Children's Services "sign contracts (whether new or renewal) before contractors supply goods or services." Before the services are even implemented, they need to have that contract. There are now concerns and issues about verbal contracts. I'd hope that these weren't the kind that we talk about on an ongoing basis, with some of the loosely worded and loose contracts just for advice, that these would be, in fact, a little bit more specific and a little bit more concrete. Has the ministry accepted this recommendation, and if so, what has the ministry done to address that specific concern of the Auditor General?

The Auditor General also mentions in the annual report, on page 130: "We again recommend that the Ministry of Children's Services improve its systems to recover expenses for providing services to children and families ordinarily resident-on-reserve." The question is: has the ministry accepted this recommendation given that the

Auditor General notes unsatisfactory progress so far within that recommendation? This is a repeated call for the recommendation. What would the minister be doing to address those specifics?

These are just a couple of issues. I know that there have been a lot that have been addressed, and I appreciate your being able to try to address them as you can. These are some of the specifics that I would like to have, that I've raised here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thanks again, Mr. Chairman. I'm not sure how much time we have left, so I'm going to kind of go very quickly. Again, I'll give our word that we will get back to you through the critic, Edmonton-Mill Woods, with some of the questions that you've asked specifically.

You started off with sexual exploitation. I did mention before that the small decrease has to do with system development enhancements, so the total budget that was reduced has nothing to do with the program. I can tell you that we've got some very exciting things happening on the issue of sexual exploitation. Unfortunately, until we have all our i's dotted and t's crossed, I can't go into it a great deal, but we will probably be announcing very shortly something that is very, very exciting on the issue of sexual exploitation, which includes Internet luring, et cetera.

I will tell the member that under the PCHIP, since the program was proclaimed, we've had approximately 900 apprehensions and 1,300 referrals. The success of that program is amazing. When I started working on it – I use this term loosely, because my staff always go crazy when I say: when I was working on the streets. But when I started on this initiative many years ago, in 1990, before I became elected, I didn't think we'd see the success in the PCHIP that I'm seeing today. When it became Bill 1, it was just something that I don't think I ever dreamt about.

I can tell you that all of the older girls and guys that were working on the street – older: 24, 25 – when I was doing my research said that if that piece of legislation would have been there when they were first on the street, they wouldn't be where they are now, still on the street. I have the opportunity on many occasions when I'm working with children from the Youth Secretariat, the youth forum, children that we've formerly apprehended from the issue of prostitution, how much they appreciate it.

We had a sexual exploitation conference last November, I believe it was. It's the first time that we've brought the players back since 1999. Again, we wanted to look where we were, where we are now, where we are going. It's unbelievable how the streets have changed. Before you used to see the young kids on the street, and you could visibly tell what they were doing. Now we're dealing with cells. We're dealing with sex bracelets, rainbow parties. We're dealing with survival sex, where a child will think it's a good idea, because they want concert tickets, to just come out at lunchtime and turn a trick and they've got the money for their concert tickets. Internet luring, child pornography: all of those things are horrific, that we're dealing with on a weekly basis within the department. One just needs to read in the paper about all the child pornography and issues.

I will tell the hon. member and give my word that we will continue to push the issue with the federal government about tightening the laws. I made a presentation to all of my counterparts across the country at the last federal/provincial/territorial meeting that I attended. As horrific and as straightforward as it was, I'll tell you that it sunk in with them. We didn't mince any words with it. We did a video presentation. I got unanimous support from all of the provinces and territories to support the issue of sexual exploitation across the country.

I then brought that to the attention of the federal minister when I met with her. We're in an early game at the federal government. We've got new ministers that are still learning their portfolios. Then you're starting to hit them with issues on sexual exploitation, child pornography, some issues of family violence. It's way too much. So we're going to let that sit for a bit. I know what it's like to be a new minister, just a little bit overwhelming with everything that's thrown at you, trying to get ready for a question period, et cetera. I can tell you that we've got some really very exciting initiatives coming forward on the issue of sexual exploitation. So be patient, but stay tuned because it's very exciting.

You talked about corporate. That increase is about \$1.84 million: \$1.24 million for salary provisions in order to address management and nonmanagement salaries, increases including the grid adjustments, a half a million in human resource management for training, and \$0.1 million for increased insurance premiums that have to be paid to risk management.

Aboriginal initiatives. Very, very exciting. Sad but true: the high percentage of aboriginals that we have not only within the Children's Services portfolio but, as the former Solicitor General, the high population of aboriginals within our correctional facilities. Sad but true. We're working on some very exciting initiatives on aboriginal issues with not only the hon. minister of aboriginal affairs. I think that it's more of a cross-government, so you'll have Health, you'll have Education, you'll have Human Resources, some of those things. We're very excited about what we're doing.

We originally had a plan – I believe it was last October before the election was called. It was the first time in the history of the Alberta government and in Canada. I had agreement with representatives from treaties 6, 7, and 8 to go with me to Ottawa, meet with the minister of aboriginal affairs – at that point in time it was Andy Scott – to talk about aboriginal issues on reserve and off reserve. Of course, the election was called. New government, new minister. We have just sent a letter to the minister of aboriginal affairs, Jim Prentice, telling him that we want to talk about aboriginal issues. Once we have our initial talks and then, obviously, listen to what he has to say and his ideas, we still would like to continue with the meeting with treaties 6, 7, and 8. I know that my colleague from aboriginal affairs has also written to Minister Prentice of aboriginal affairs.

5:10

We have also got some exciting initiatives happening in regard to aboriginal affairs. My staff is watching me up there and saying, "How much is she going to give out now?" We've got some really exciting things happening on the issue of aboriginal adoptions. I'm very excited about what we're going to be doing after some very hard work within the department and consultation with the regions, the FNAs, and, of course, Métis settlements on how you can move the issue of aboriginal adoptions forward, keeping in mind that when adoptions are handled outside of the aboriginal community, the aboriginal people want to keep a sense of the values and cultures on the aboriginal initiative.

It's always a challenge trying to look at the numbers. It saddens me when I look at the number of aboriginal children I have.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Children's Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$916,770,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would move that the committee now rise and report the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: 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.

Children's Services: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$916,770,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur,

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Speaker's Ruling

Tabling Cited Documents

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, earlier this afternoon in response to a point of order raised by the Official Opposition House Leader, the chair undertook to review the Blues, as promised, regarding the exchange during question period between the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. The Official Opposition House Leader argued that the document should be tabled on the basis that the minister had quoted extensively from it.

The chair has carefully reviewed the Blues and can advise the House as follows. The only reference the minister made to documents was during the last exchange, and it was clear that the minister was making reference to documents that have already been tabled in the Assembly. To summarize the relevant parliamentary authorities, there is no requirement to table a document that has not been cited. The chair once again would refer members to *Beauchesne's*, paragraph 495(4), for this point. Finally, the chair would like to remind all members that once a document has been tabled, there is no need for that document to be tabled again.

The chair will now recognize the hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed been another absolutely excellent day of progress. With Children's Services estimates: a lot of inspiring, motivational debate.

Just before I propose the motion, I would like to take this moment to briefly wish a very Happy Easter to everyone who is celebrating and a wonderful break to those who are celebrating the birthday of Khalsa in our Sikh community. May they enjoy an equally fine weekend. To those on the Ukrainian side, Khrystos voskres!

[Motion carried; pursuant to Government Motion 13 the Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]

