

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title: Monday, May 8, 2006**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 06/05/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

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

Hon. members and those in the galleries, if you'd now join us in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led today by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please participate in the language of your choice.

**Hon. Members:**

O Canada, our home and native land!  
True patriot love in all thy sons command.  
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,  
The True North strong and free!  
From far and wide, O Canada,  
We stand on guard for thee.  
God keep our land glorious and free!  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.  
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

**The Speaker:** Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce Brent Seib, Yaser Shawar, Eman Oliver, and David Lam. Brent is the manager at Westmount Scotiabank and is also a proud supporter of a number of local charities. Over the Christmas season Brent attended the ATCO and *Edmonton Sun* Christmas Charity Auction. He bid and won a fantastic lunch of sandwiches – correct? – for four with me, which we enjoyed this afternoon. Now, I'm told that the auction raised close to \$230,000 in donations, which was shared among Edmonton Catholic Social Services, the Christmas Bureau of Edmonton, the capital region United Way, and the Stollery children's foundation. Each of these charities does important work in Edmonton and its surrounding communities, so I'm proud to be able to support them by having lunch with these four community-minded Albertans. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask all members of the Assembly to join me in offering them the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my father, Dr. Fred Cenaiko, who is seated in your gallery. My father immigrated from Poland in 1926. He started his education in Canada, leaving home at 14 years of age to finish grade 12, and later began medical school at the University of Alberta here in Edmonton. On completion he began his medical practice in Wakaw, Saskatchewan, in 1955.

For over 50 years and now at the age of 80 my father has served his community as a family physician in Wakaw with a remarkable commitment based on strong personal integrity and professional ethics. He started satellite clinics around Wakaw, including one on

the One Arrow reserve near Batoche. As a member of the Christian Medical & Dental Associations' missions he travelled to Central America yearly for 30 years, providing both medical and dental assistance to thousands of nationals who could not afford health services whatsoever. My father is also a recognized practitioner in alternative modalities of treatment for chronic pain, and he has people coming from across Canada to see him. His motto is: education is the key to success. He feels that education plays a strong role in giving people the power and potential to do great things with their lives.

Mr. Speaker, my father has received the Saskatchewan Order of Merit, the Ukrainian nation builders award from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and has been nominated for the Order of Canada. Dr. Cenaiko has been a role model and mentor for many in his field and his community and plays a lead role in my life.

My brother Lloyd is president of the Humanitarian Aid Response Teams, HART, which provides programs and medical support to children in Ukraine. He's accompanying my father today.

The hon. Premier and Mrs. Klein and the hon. Minister of Education had the opportunity to attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Ukraine for a children's playground centre and one of numerous orphanages there.

I'd ask my father and my brother Lloyd to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

**Mr. Coutts:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly seven members of the civil service in Sustainable Resource Development. These members are all part of our strategic forestry initiative division in Sustainable Resource Development, and they're responsible for the very important softwood lumber and the value-added portions of our ministry. They're seated in the members' gallery, and as I repeat their names, I'm going to ask them to rise and be recognized by the Assembly as they go about learning more about what happens in the Assembly. The first one is Mr. Pat Guidera, followed by Mrs. Gloria Hossinger, Mrs. Sandra Candeias, Ms Donna Fregren, Mr. Siegfried Bahde, Mr. Paul Short, and Mr. Gordon Giles. I'd ask the Assembly to please give them the warm welcome.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education.

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure for me this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 27 of Alberta's brightest and finest and sharpest young minds. They happen to come from the Avonmore elementary school in my riding, and they are here accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Jill Atkins Cyr, and parents helpers Karen Loveridge and Connie Demchuk. I had the pleasure of meeting with them a few moments ago, and I can attest to their brilliance. I would ask all of the students from Avonmore elementary to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members here. Welcome.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of four individuals who are with us today to help commemorate May as Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. This is the organization that

has presented us with the beautiful red carnations on our desks this afternoon, and that's to bring awareness to the concerns of those with multiple sclerosis and their families and their caregivers. I'm pleased to introduce from the Alberta division of the MS Society of Canada Neil Pierce, president; Garry Wheeler, vice-president; Darrel Gregory, director of communications; and Alison Hagan, director of development. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

**Mr. Liepert:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to introduce a class from a school in my constituency which has some specific significance to at least one member of this Legislature and to a former member of the Legislature. It's the Webber Academy, the grade 5 class. They are accompanied today by Ms Janice Chan, Mr. Daniel Mondaca, Mrs. Tanya Ferguson, and Mrs. Janet Adamson, their teachers. I believe they're located in both galleries, and I'd ask them to stand and be recognized by this House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

**Mr. Marz:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to recognize today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very, very special guest, special to me in that she was actually involved in all three of the election campaigns that I ran in, and I would say that she played a very important role in getting me elected three times. That is my granddaughter, who is part of the Webber Academy class. I didn't spot which side she's sitting on, but I would ask Mackenzie Symons, my granddaughter, to stand and be recognized by the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and all members of the Assembly 66 students from St. John Bosco school in my constituency. Now, they're just starting to study government, so they look with anticipation to figure out exactly how things work here. They've got teachers here: Mr. McNeely, Mrs. Adolf, and Ms Giampa; parent helpers Mrs. Pelletier, Mr. Johnston, and Ms Chimenti. I'd ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two constituents of mine from Calgary-Currie: Keith Purdy and Rick Kennedy. On August 20 last year, a fine, warm summer's day, I had the honour of attending their wedding, a civil ceremony performed by an Alberta marriage commissioner that took place one month after federal legislation allowing same-sex marriage was given royal assent. Rick and Keith are fast approaching their first official anniversary but, in fact, have been together as a couple now for 16 years. They tell me that that's the longest relationship in either of their families, which suggests to me that love and commitment to make a marriage work are more important than whether the couple is gay or straight. They're seated in the visitors' gallery, and I would ask Keith and Rick to stand now and receive what I hope will be the traditional warm welcome of the House.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands Norwood.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Charan Khehra and his wife, Surender Khehra. Just this past Friday the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers awarded Charan the lifetime achievement award in recognition of his contribution to his community, to Alberta, and to Canada. Charan has an excellent record of public service since coming to this country, including 12 years with the Alberta department of labour as a senior economist and policy analyst and then as a staff member with the NDP opposition caucus. Charan serves on a number of community and other public advisory boards. Surender is also a former government of Alberta employee and is actively involved in the community as well. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would now invite them to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to introduce a special guest in the members' gallery, Ryan Portman, who is a friend and an active and caring member of the Calgary community, a grade 10 student. He's visiting here today to find out what an MLA does in the Legislature. Let's give him our warm welcome to the Legislature.

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

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we've seen so far today, we are very fortunate in this House to introduce some truly inspirational Albertans. It's my honour now to recognize a couple of people that I would fit into that category for sure. One is a legend in municipal and provincial and national politics. Many of you know her. I say that she's a legend; she's also a young lady. She's worked with the likes of Diane Ablonczy, Tony Clement, Scott Brison, Jon Lord, Moe Amery, Mark Hlady, and David Heyman. You know her as Kim Linkletter. She's a volunteer extraordinaire with a few groups, like the Calgary Round-Up Band, Girl Guides, Heritage Park, St. Albert the Great Parish, school parent councils, and a number of local PC associations, including Calgary-Lougheed. Without Kim I wouldn't be here. I guess that I should be thanking you, shouldn't I, Kim? Joining Kim is her lovely daughter Virginia, who I'm sure at the end of the day will have a resumé twice as long. Please help me welcome two inspirational Albertans, Kim and Virginia Linkletter.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a relatively new addition to the staff at the Official Opposition caucus. Earl Woods has been tasked with the enviable job of taking thoughts and ideas of MLAs and putting them into words that match prose and, hopefully, catch the imagination of the citizens of this province. I would ask Earl to please stand at this time in the public gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of all members of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

### Health Issues in Fort Chipewyan

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There is rapidly growing evidence supporting a possible major medical outbreak in northern Alberta. The town of Fort Chipewyan is reporting extremely high rates of cancers and other serious illnesses among its small population. Medical experts, town officials, residents, First Nation leaders, and scientific advisers all agree that the provincial government needs to act now to determine the causes of this outbreak. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that a report was issued in 1999 detailing concerns over the high rates of leukemia, lymphomas, lupus, and autoimmune diseases, why after a year and a half on the job is the minister just now learning about this study and its recommendations?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not just learning about it. As a matter of fact, about six weeks ago on CBC I gave a comment on this very thing. It was profiled at that time. There was the discovery of yet another case of cancer. Actually, for several years now industry, the Northern Lights health region, Health Canada, Environment officials, and Alberta Health and Wellness have been co-operating in doing their due diligence on the kinds of issues that might emerge to identify cancer. It is not conclusive. Everything we know thus far is not conclusive, in fact, that these cases, while tragic and unfortunate, have been caused by any environmental factor.

I can say that the group met most recently on April 25 of this year and reviewed some of the data which may be of significance. We're waiting for them to go through the process of the kind of work you do when you're following up on both the etiology and what the understanding is of the progression.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the minister's comments can the minister tell the House if she knows of any other factors besides the oil sands developments in the Fort Chip area that may be causing the high rates of cancer and other diseases in that region?

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that are being focused on; for example, questions by the NRBS and the group's focus on priorities such as pollution prevention, hormone problems in fish, water flows and quality, contaminants, nutrients, safe drinking water, and enhanced environmental monitoring. Two human health-related initiatives are also in place during the review to ensure that there is safety of drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, we have urged that people not panic on this or, in fact, inflame what is a very proper and appropriate scientific investigation. It will be thorough to the degree that all of those partners bring their own expertise on board, and I trust that we will get conclusions that will lead us to find solutions.

1:50

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that this government and this minister made cutbacks to aboriginal health strategies in their latest budget, how can First Nations people be assured that proper long-term strategies are being implemented to protect them from possible negative health problems?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I will resist talking about the number of people who questioned me on the health budget as it relates to grants

to aboriginal people. My recollection is that approximately 25 per cent of the grants specifically targeted to aboriginal programs throughout Alberta – and those are grants, not the normal day-to-day funding that goes through the regional health authorities. There was a proportionately small reduction in grant programs, recognizing that the grants that were in place in those circumstances were grants where, quite properly, the federal government should cover those costs. They were not significant in terms of anything that I could identify that would impact upon any kind of support that's provided for aboriginal people in northern Alberta. Quite the contrary. These kinds of grants, of which I would be pleased to table a list, supplement other programs and supports that are throughout Alberta.

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

### School Nutrition Programs

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One must question this government's priorities when they spend nearly a million dollars a year on luxury vehicles for cabinet ministers while neglecting thousands of Alberta schoolchildren who go to school hungry every day. Ask these ministers to give up their \$40,000 government cars, and I bet that they'd make quite a fuss. Ask them to provide funding for school nutrition programs, and they vote it down. Apparently, getting cabinet ministers to work in luxury vehicles is the job of the province, where feeding hungry children falls solely on the backs of impoverished families. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Given that this minister has repeatedly accepted government cars, including, for example, a Buick LeSabre Limited Edition, why is it the government's direct responsibility to provide this minister with a fancy car when it isn't the government's direct responsibility to provide a school nutrition program for hungry children in Alberta?

**Mr. Zwodzesky:** Mr. Speaker, you know, you have an option to either accept a government vehicle or take a kilometrage rate. I'm quite sure that the opposition leader takes a kilometrage rate, and if he does, I'd ask him to admit that he does. Perhaps he'd be willing to give his up. The thing is that when I evaluated that from my particular perspective, I found it to be less expensive to the taxpayer for me to actually accept a government car, so that's the decision that I made.

With respect to school nutrition programs I have answered that question in this House at least three or four times. I'd be happy to answer it again because a lot of people, obviously, including the Liberal opposition, don't yet know that we have approximately 70 per cent of our school boards today who do offer some type of a nutritional program. Some have hot lunch programs, others have breakfast programs, and so on. They do it to accommodate local needs, and they do it in partnership with local community agencies, which were referenced earlier in *Hansards* from previous occasions.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Premier. How does this Premier justify government policies that provide high-salaried deputy ministers with a dedicated \$40,000-a-year car allowance when it doesn't provide 2 cents of dedicated funding for school nutrition programs?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Education pointed out, school boards are provided with a budget, and it's entirely up to

the school boards as to whether they wish to spend that money on hot lunch programs or on other issues that they consider to be priorities. I would remind the hon. member that school boards are elected, just as he is elected. A certain amount of money is provided to school boards, and it's entirely up to them as to whether they wish to provide hot lunch or hot breakfast programs.

Mr. Speaker, relative to vehicles the hon. minister explained that there is an option of having a vehicle or taking mileage. I'm sure that the hon. Leader of the Opposition, if he doesn't have a vehicle, takes mileage or kilometrage, which is very significant. I can recall that an opposition member – and it was the NDs who were in opposition at that time – criticized me, of course, as Minister of Environment for taking a plane up to I believe it was Bonnyville from Calgary. But he didn't mention that he drove up there and charged the government – I forget – about 27 cents a kilometre all the way to Bonnyville and back, which amounted to quite a bit.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the minister of learning: will this minister do the right thing and give up his dedicated \$40,000-a-year car allowance until this government can provide dedicated funding for school nutrition programs? Do the right thing, Gene.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to correct myself. It's not 70 per cent; it's actually 77 per cent. It's actually 77 per cent of our school boards who offer school meal programs ranging from daily to perhaps weekly to something else, and they do it in partnership with very proud corporate volunteer organizations to ensure that those children who are in need receive it. Furthermore, if there are children who are in need above and beyond that, we do have a number of other government programs that they might wish to access. I'd ask the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to just briefly augment the other part of the question.

**The Speaker:** Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

### Education Funding

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two things will be getting bigger next year: class size and the standardized testing office. Decades of centralization have expanded the central administration office in the Department of Education. This department now has more than double the staff of British Columbia's Department of Education for a comparable number of students and is getting bigger. My question to the Minister of Education: why is the third year of the Alberta Commission on Learning recommendation 14, the class size initiative, being cut when the standardized testing office is expanding?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, there is quite a large non sequitur there, but let me address it in any event. The Learning Commission, when it brought in its recommendations, said: here are the targets that we would like you to achieve on a jurisdiction-wide basis over a period of five years. We attempted to do that much quicker. We tried to do it in three years. We had benchmarks set along the way. After the two-year period is concluded, which is this coming June, we know that we will have seen class size averages on a jurisdiction-wide basis reduced to within or to have bettered the targets set at the two-year benchmark in all grade levels except kindergarten to grade 3.

What we've done in this third year is targeted the monies in the class size initiative to do two things: first of all, to retain the 1,688 brand new teachers that have been added to the system over the past two years; and secondly, to target the monies where they are needed most, and that is in the kindergarten to grade 3 level because that is where our class sizes are not yet at the level of 17 on a jurisdictional average-wide basis.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has the minister considered decentralizing education by reducing the number of staff in his central office and flowing these dollars through to the local jurisdictions that need it?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, as I recall – and this may be before the hon. member's time in the House – there were a number of comments made with respect to supporting the Learning Commission document. In fact, we have responded with support for almost 90-some of those recommendations, and that has meant – guess what? – adding some additional staff to help accomplish them at the central office. There are a number of outstanding programs that are requiring additional expertise within my ministry, and we have added the staff to arrive at the best practices from around the world, from other parts of Canada, and so on to ensure that those programs are provided to keep Alberta in the position of being able to say: we have the best education system in Canada, and we're working very aggressively to have one of the best, if not the best, in all of the world.

2:00

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How does the minister justify increasing the number of staff in the standardized testing office by five members to a total of 696 staff when school boards are forced to cut teachers?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any school boards that are being forced to cut teachers. I think what's important to remember here is that we are in what we call the preliminary budgeting period. The actual budgets for school boards will be turned in to me and my ministry, as per previous years, on or before June 30. In fact, up until the end of May school boards don't even know, for example, how many teachers will be retiring because teachers aren't required to let their school boards know until the end of May. Now, that in itself will have quite a large impact, and there are other similar factors to be worked in. They have also just received their jurisdictional profile numbers, and they are all getting an increase. I don't think there's a single school board out there that isn't sharing in the \$5.3 billion that this government is providing to educate kindergarten to grade 12 students this coming year.

**The Speaker:** The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

### Donations to Political Parties

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There's an old saying that he who pays the piper calls the tune. The 2005 annual financial statements filed at the chief electoral office show the unhealthy reliance of both the provincial Conservative and Liberal parties on corporate donations: 73 per cent of PC Party contributions came from corporations and almost half of Liberal Party contributions. By contrast, over 99 per cent of Alberta NDP contributions

last year came from individual Albertans. My question is to the Deputy Premier. Why does this government refuse to follow the lead of their federal cousins as well as the governments in provinces like Quebec and Manitoba and amend our laws here in Alberta to get big money out of Alberta politics by restricting donations to individual Albertans only?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not surprised at the numbers that the hon. member has put forward, but I would suggest that it has far more to do with policy than it does with anything else. It's well known that this government supports free enterprise, that this government's policies are to keep taxes low to leave more money in Albertans' pockets. I would not dare to speak for the Liberal opposition, but I think it's also well known what the NDs' philosophy is in those areas. So I'll stand for free enterprise, for more money in Albertans' pockets, and that will be the basis that I recommend policy in this government.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, can the minister then explain why the government is cutting corporations' taxes by 15 per cent in an overheated economy and at the same time cutting important programs for aboriginal children and aboriginal health and so on if not because they've received such massive donations from the corporate sector?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a stretch. That's a real stretch. Good, sound economics would suggest that lowering taxes on all levels is good for the economy. There isn't an economist that I have heard from or read that doesn't suggest that lowering taxes both on the business side and a personal side makes a stronger economy.

In the early 1990s, when this province was struggling with debt, our Premier made a statement and, in fact, a commitment to Albertans, suggested that if we followed these policies, we would reap the benefits down the road. Mr. Speaker, the benefits are here today. Those corporations are the very people who are investing in this economy, that are ensuring that Albertans have jobs, including our aboriginal peoples.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's too bad the disabled and the poor can't make donations to the Conservative Party because maybe they would get some attention from this government.

Given that this government's Ottawa cousins are tightening the existing rules on federal party leadership contest donations, why is the Conservative government refusing to regulate leadership contests of registered political parties, thereby avoiding the mistake of allowing the Premier's chair to be bought by the highest bidder?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak to this, having gone through a leadership contest. Even the NDs can buy a membership, \$5, and they can cast a vote, and the Liberals can buy a membership and cast a vote. Many of them did, and many of them probably will, NDs and Liberals alike, and cast a vote as they did in the last leadership campaign, as they did en masse in the last leadership campaign.

So it's not at my beck and call; it's at the beck and call of the people of this province. By the way, this is the only party with a democratic process to select a leader.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Stony Plain, followed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

### Support for First Nations

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many First Nations are expressing disappointment and calling the new federal government's budget announcement a major step backwards. Their concerns relate to the government's decision to scrap the \$5 billion Kelowna accord aimed at improving the lives of aboriginal people. My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Knowing that this budget is a far cry from the \$5 billion committed in the Kelowna accord, how does the federal budget benefit aboriginal Albertans?

**Ms Calahasen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, we were very disappointed as well that there was absolutely no mention in the budget about the Kelowna accord. There was a lot of time, a lot of work, a lot of effort that went into that accord to make sure that we were dealing with the gaps in the aboriginal community.

Mr. Speaker, although this budget doesn't address all the targets that we had talked about, there are some examples of some good things that I think can result: as an example, \$450 million for improving water and, of course, the other one is on-reserve housing, educational outcomes, and \$300 million to address immediate off-reserve housing, which is a huge issue, and I think that's what some of the people in the urban areas are seeing; \$2.2 billion to address the residential schools; \$150 million to improve . . .\*

**The Speaker:** Hon. minister, please. Are the numbers the hon. minister is giving applicable to Alberta?

**Ms Calahasen:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** All of them? Two point two billion of this, and \$400 million for Alberta?

**Ms Calahasen:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I'll just tell you how.

**The Speaker:** No. We'll go on to the next question.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental to the same minister: given that aboriginal people are migrating to urban centres at an increasing rate, are there any dollars in the federal budget to address this transition?

**Ms Calahasen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, just so that people will understand what we're dealing with, the aboriginal community, as you know, is migrating into the cities in massive amounts. As an example, in Edmonton alone there is a population of 40,000 presently; that was the 2001 census. As a matter of fact, in Calgary it is 22,000 people who have migrated into the cities.

When we're talking about urban population, we're dealing with a lot of issues, and I'm very, very proud to hear that we are dealing with off-reserve housing, which has been one of the concerns from the cities, and, secondly, Mr. Speaker, the outcomes for aboriginal women, the children, and, of course, the families that deal with education. As you know, when they migrate into the cities, they deal with the educational component. So, Mr. Speaker, these details, unfortunately, are not fleshed out yet, and as we all know, the devil is in the details.

2:10

**Mr. Lindsay:** My second supplemental to the same minister: knowing the limited amount of money in the budget for aboriginal people, what are you doing to advocate on their behalf?

\*See p. 1347, right col., para. 7

**Ms Calahasen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really proud to be able to talk about it. First of all, I met with the minister of Indian and northern affairs Canada. We discussed the priorities that the First Nations have had, and he's had meetings with the First Nations. I think what we have to do is continue to work with the minister of INAC but also with my government, which has been very key in dealing with a number of issues. I think we need to continue to collaborate with the federal minister, with the First Nations to be able to deal with these things. I will carefully scrutinize the process that will be utilized in determining what the next steps will be in the whole budget process.

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister will be able to continue her discussion in response to the Speaker Wednesday afternoon when their estimates are designated.

**Ms Calahasen:** Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

### Continuing Care Standards

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Auditor General's report on long-term care indicated that basic standards were not current and that systems to monitor the compliance with standards were not adequate. The continuing care standards released last week were more like suggestions to the regional health authorities than the strong, enforceable standards recommended by the Auditor General and certainly desired by many Albertans. They are too general and too fragmented to protect the health and safety of residents in continuing care facilities. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: can the minister explain why she delegated responsibility for monitoring compliance with health standards to the regional health authorities rather than establishing a provincial independent continuing care commissioner as the Liberal opposition has suggested?

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

**Ms Evans:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For any reader that understands the meaning of "shall," there are many places in the standards that say that the "regional health authority shall," and it's a very definite requirement about what they should do. But beyond that, on the back two pages of the standards, there's a section on the Health Quality Council role. Recently we've worked with the Health Quality Council to place them on the same parallel in authority for quality decision-making and quality monitoring as a regional health authority, and the Health Quality Council has a role and responsibility in making sure that quality is delivered. So within the context of the standards and with an understanding of the new role of the Health Quality Council, it's not only the regional health authority that will be delivering quality but the responsibility of the Health Quality Council to not only assure that health quality is maintained for continuing care but will be in conversations with the regions on those issues.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. I believe those councils should be above the regional health authorities.

Why does the minister find it acceptable for continuing care residents to receive different levels of care depending on which region they live in?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, the attempt within the standards is to acknowledge that there are different mixes of populations and different kinds of care provided. There are even different ranges of facilities, from assisted living or places where people receive partial care because of the kinds of acuity they have. So it would be very difficult to respond as the ministry wanting them to receive different care, but we have different kinds of care facilities. As to the quality of care, you should receive the type and quality of care that you need based on the assessment of your personal care needs and the plan that is developed with the long-term care resident and their family. So I would say that if you're a long-term care resident with a particular acuity in one region, you should receive the same type of care, the same intensity, and the same scope of treatment in another region.

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

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. I agree, but I don't think it's happening. Why is the minister making continuing care staff, residents, and their families wait another year before legislating continuing care standards that would be provincial?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the capacity of some authorities may not be up to the same capacity as others, so we've asked for implementation of certain standards, in particular those that are surrounding patient safety, immediately. Many of them are ready to do that. Some are finding and facing staffing issues, staffing mix issues, where we aren't able to get the required number of staff. But there is good news on the horizon. Recently in Palliser, for example, 30 new staff were retained to support quality long-term care, and we'll continue to develop a workforce strategy that enables them all to be to this standard.

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

### Criminal Sentencing Changes

**Rev. Abbott:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the federal government introduced two bills that will change the Criminal Code and make for tougher sentences for criminals. Apparently one would impose mandatory minimum sentences for various gun-related crimes while the other would eliminate conditional sentences like house arrest for serious crimes. My question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister tell us how the proposed change to sentences for gun crimes will affect Alberta?

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

**Mr. Stevens:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last fall the Attorneys General and Solicitors General met in Whitehorse and at that time, among other things, discussed the gun crimes that were occurring across the country, particularly at that time in the Toronto area. Here in Alberta we do not have the same extent of gun crimes, but it is a serious issue. There is a particular connection between guns and organized crime, particularly the drug trade, so I can tell you that the initiative of the federal government in bringing mandatory minimums with respect to certain gun crimes that are related, particularly, with other crimes is a very good move. It will ensure that conditional sentencing is not available in those particular crimes, and it means that people who today are not doing time in jail as a result of similar circumstances will in fact, once this law becomes a law of Canada, be doing time in jail.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. What effect will the proposed legislation on eliminating the option of conditional sentences for serious crimes have here in Alberta?

**Mr. Stevens:** Well, this is another matter that was discussed last fall at the federal/provincial/territorial meeting. In fact, Alberta has been leading the way for the last five years in asking the federal government to get serious with respect to serious crimes and ensuring that conditional sentencing is not available in those areas. Conditional sentencing is quite appropriate in minor crimes but not in serious crimes. I can tell you that as of last fall every provincial justice minister, every territorial justice minister was agreed that the federal government needed to do something. So, once again, this is a very good move. It will ensure that people who do serious crime will do some serious time now whereas today there is a very good chance that they go home and watch colour television, albeit under certain restrictions.

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

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Solicitor General. Given that our correctional institutions and remand centres are reportedly already over capacity, where will all these additional prisoners be housed?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

**Mr. Cernaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. About 10 days ago I had the opportunity to meet with the Hon. Stockwell Day, Minister of Public Safety for Canada, and these were some of the issues that we discussed. There is a commitment – and there was a commitment in this last week's budget – from the federal government regarding providing resources as well as financial support for institutions in the capacity that they have right now. The offenders that the hon. member and the Minister of Justice spoke about are looking at serious crimes that have a mandatory minimum of possibly five years or more. Obviously, those are federal sentences. Those inmates would be placed in federal institutions, not provincial institutions, and there is a commitment from them for funding for additional space if required in the future.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

### Home-care Funding

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recruiting for caregivers in home-care programs has pitted individuals in the self-managed care programs against larger facilities and institutions which provide home care. There is a critical shortage of home-care workers, which is further exacerbated because these low-paid caregivers have to pay their own fuel costs to travel from location to location. Current funding models do not address these issues. My questions are to the minister of health. Given that people with progressive disabilities require 24-hour home care and the current funding model only provides for 10 hours, what does the government expect them to do for the other 14 hours?

2:20

**Ms Evans:** Well, Mr. Speaker, relative to the very specific supports for people in transportation, there may not be in place in every

circumstance sufficient capacity in the regions. That's something that we'll have to check, and we'll see exactly how they intend to spend the money.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Assembly of something I mentioned during Committee of Supply last week. Since March 15 of last year this government has put \$83 million more into long-term and continuing care for the quality delivery of care. It has nothing to do with the amount of money that we have added through the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports' budget. It is purely to increase the amount of money for caregivers. It is to ensure that there are safe lifting policies in places. It's to ensure that regional health authorities have sufficient dollars to expand on the level of care and commitment to those with continuing care needs.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd be very happy to look into the very specific item about the mileage relative to the home-care delivery personnel and investigate it as the member sees fit.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Again to the same minister: what is the government's plan to increase the total number of trained home-care workers and staff through school spaces and foreign qualifications? What arrangements has she made with her colleagues?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, we have an aggressive workforce plan that we will be delivering in the next few weeks with the opportunity to be fully conversant on all portions of it, but I should indicate that we have 8,800 aides in Alberta that will all be fully trained in skills as of March 31, 2008. We are working to make sure that they are enhanced in their skills and that the proper people that have the proper type of learning are in place to look after people in either home-care situations or in continuing care residences.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If the minister's investigations on the fuel cost issue are satisfactory, will the minister commit to new funding models which do include a fuel cost or mileage arrangement for home-care workers whether they're individuals working for self-managed care programs or working in institutions and travelling from institution to institution?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, the responsibility for delivery has rested with the regional health authority. The very specific nature of this inquiry is such that I would feel much more comfortable getting the accurate information and tabling a response in the House not only to the accuracy of what is being provided for continuing care support but following up with a response that would assure the hon. member about our intentions relative to any expanded program if that's even within the feasibility.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### Police and Peace Officer Training Centre

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in the fall the Alberta Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security issued a request for a proposal to build a centralized training centre for police and peace officers. Thirty communities submitted, I understand, some very excellent proposals to the department. In February they were asked to wait until May to find out who had the successful bid. My questions to the minister are: when will these communities find out who has the successful bid?

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

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member mentioned, our department is looking at developing a single-site facility to improve the quality of training by setting a training centre which would have superior standards of training not just for police but, as well, for peace officers. We received 30 tremendous proposals with 42 land options from those communities. Our department has been reviewing them, and we'll continue to study them, and then we will be making the decision of a short list coming out in the near future. There is a lot of work to do. These are very large proposals, and there is a lot of work involved in looking at each of them.

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

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that there is no funding for the training centre provided in this year's budget, what are your plans to move forward with the development of this training centre?

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Well, that's a very good question, Mr. Speaker, and it's a very important question. As we move forward in looking at the development of a site and/or of a centre of this nature, being one of the only two provinces left in Canada that do not have one, obviously the importance is there. How do we look at the future model for funding it? We want to work with not just government but look at opportunities regarding a private/public partnership in securing the facility but, as well, looking at the opportunity for the rural development strategy and building some of these opportunities for rural development, not just for major urban centres.

**Mr. Marz:** Given that the minister is looking for P3s, is he expecting the communities to resubmit proposals including P3s?

**Mr. Cenaiko:** No, Mr. Speaker. As we move through this process, site visits will occur with those centres. Obviously, the proposals that have come forward and have been examined and studied: there will be site visits that will be required by department staff to actually go to look at the site, look at the land. As well, it will provide an opportunity for better understanding of what may be required due to the geographic land situation. As I mentioned earlier, a P3 model would come from the private/public sector, not necessarily from a municipality although tied into the municipality because of the public nature of the facility as well as the opportunity for the public to partially utilize some of the facility itself.

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

#### Sale of Surplus Crown Land in Edmonton

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Progressive Conservative government continues to sell surplus land around the Edmonton and Calgary ring roads for a wide range of prices. The prices start as low as pennies per acre, and taxpayers are not getting the maximum return on some of these deals. We must examine more closely some of these deals from the 2003 *Alberta Gazette*. My first question is to the minister of infrastructure. In January 2003 why did the Walton International Group Inc. pay on average \$18,000 per acre for land in Edmonton when MacEwan West Developments and other developers paid close to \$50,000 per acre for surplus government land also sold in the city of Edmonton?

**Mr. Lund:** Well, Mr. Speaker, since he didn't have the courtesy to give me any forewarning, I do not have the deal. If he's doing like he did on Thursday, he mixes up apples and oranges again, taking sales from a certain year in a hot area versus another year in an area that isn't a hot market. As a matter of fact, one of the parcels he talked about last Thursday wasn't even serviced, so how on earth could it have anywhere near the value of another parcel? And I don't imagine that he went to the Auditor General like I asked him to on Thursday. I don't imagine that he did that, because he knows very well that nothing wrong has happened.

However, let me correct a few of the things. He was correct that we did pay \$22,000, slightly more, per acre on a parcel of land in 1981. Remember: 1981 was the highest value, and we're probably now just starting to exceed it, so for anything that he says about sales in 2001 and those kinds of things, of course it's cheaper – of course – because the land values are. As far as selling for pennies, he's obviously referring to the Sheckter deal, and I would like him to stand up in this House and show the House where, in fact, we sold land for so-called pennies an acre. It's not true.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. infrastructure minister is in charge of the *Alberta Gazette*, so I would encourage him to read the *Alberta Gazette* for the year 2003. It's not my job to read his documents.

#### Speaker's Ruling Urgency of Questions

**The Speaker:** Okay. Stop now. I've just about had enough of this. We have motions for returns and written questions on the Order Paper. This is now 2006, and we're going back into history. There's been an election since the last time as well. There's not one precedent that says: why don't we ask questions about the great railway debate and scandal of 1911? That would be just as appropriate. Find a specific question that's current today, and we'll move on.

#### 2:30 Sales of Surplus Crown Land in Edmonton (continued)

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. In March of 2003 why did Walton International Group Inc. pay on average \$15,000 per acre when South Terwillegar Developments Ltd. paid on average \$46,000 per acre for surplus government land that was sold by this government, by this department, in the city of Edmonton? We're talking about 2003.

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, continuing on from Thursday. Of course, he hasn't given me any – I could have had all of the answers here today if he would have. We sell hundreds of parcels of land a year, hundreds of them, and for that member to think that he can ask me a question on any specific day on a specific site without giving me any previous notice that he's going to do it, I don't have the ability, nor does he, to even begin.

Now, once again I suspect that we're going to find that he's mixing apples and oranges. But going back to Thursday, the fact is that on the parcel that he referred to that we sold, we did have two appraisals done on it by licensed appraisers, people that know, and we even got more for the land than the appraisers said.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again to the same minister: who in this government signed the deals to sell these properties to Walton International Group Inc. for about 30 per cent of the sale price per acre that the



government got for other properties sold at the same time in the city of Edmonton? Who signed that deal?

**Mr. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, I would hope that tomorrow, when I have all the answers for the questions that he asked today, the member will stand up and say that he's sorry that he is painting a picture that we, in fact, are selling land at a huge loss and that somebody in my department is allowing this to happen and signing it off. I hope that he will stand up and apologize for that.

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

### School Class Sizes

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton public is one of a growing number of school boards across the province facing crippling budget deficits. In Edmonton public's case they are projecting a deficit of \$7 million at the end of the school year. Last week I tabled a memo from Edmonton public's superintendent. The memo informed trustees that a significant portion of the projected deficit is because Alberta Education reneged on a commitment to fully fund the kindergarten to grade 3 class size target by 2006-2007. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why did Alberta Education renege on a December 2004 commitment to provide \$4.2 million to Edmonton public in 2006-07 and instead provide only \$1.9 million to achieve K to 3 class size targets?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I indicated earlier this afternoon some statistical facts with respect to the Learning Commission's recommendation as it affects and impacts class sizes, and I indicated at the time, I believe, that at the two-year benchmark, which will be concluded here on or about June 30, we'll know that all school jurisdictions will have met or will have bettered the guideline, the benchmark, that was set for the two-year period in all grade levels other than kindergarten to grade 3. Clearly, what we're trying to do now is work with the school boards and address the kindergarten to grade 3 group level, which is where we need additional dollars for reducing class sizes by hiring more teachers, and we are going to be doing that.

I think that by the time this year ends, we will have provided in excess of \$200 million for the class size reduction initiative, and that's a considerable amount of money in a very short period of time. We reduced the window from five years to three years. We found that there were some problems with that, so we're extending it and giving the boards a little more flexibility and a little more time to meet that final age grouping in terms of class sizes.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister again. This was a commitment by the Department of Education in 2004. It's not only Edmonton; it has affected school boards right across the province. My question is: why did the minister and why did the government renege on this promise made back in 2004?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, education continues to be a very important and evolving feature of both our society and of our government's undertakings, obviously, but when you see that a problem has not been addressed, you want to rush in and help address the problem where it exists. The problem exists in the kindergarten to grade 3 level. I don't know how I can make that any more clear.

Secondly, let's remember that for all of the new teachers that have been hired in September of '04 and all of the new additional teachers that were hired in September of '05, those new teachers are provided

for in the budget. We are providing money for their salaries, for their pensions, and so on. On top of that, we're providing a significant amount of brand new monies to hire yet more teachers, probably up to 200 new teachers, in the coming September school year.

**Mr. Martin:** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that school boards are facing deficits right across this province. For Edmonton it meant the \$2.3 million they were promised and didn't get. Other school boards are in the same situation. I ask the minister this: why did this happen when there were problems for these boards?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton public school board budget for basic education, not including infrastructure, should be going up from about \$560.5 million for the '05-06 fiscal government year to about \$577 million, and that is in spite of a flatline in terms of student enrolment growth. In fact, Edmonton public's student growth may be in the negative position. We'll know very soon. We should also remember that we are only going through now what we call the preliminary budgeting phase. Final budgets will be provided to us by the end of June, which is the standard requirement, and at that point we'll see where things stand.

Right now it is quite premature, I would offer, to be speculating on whether or not schools will be in deficit positions. I would be prepared to look at that again by the end of June and give further comment. When a school board is faced with a deficit position, all they have to do is write me a letter, explain why they're in that deficit position, explain how they plan to get out of that deficit position. I will sit down with my senior officials and review their case and make a decision on whether we will accept their deficit elimination plan if, unfortunately, they are in that position.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development wishes to supplement an answer given earlier in the question period.

### Support for First Nations

*(continued)*

**Ms Calahasen:** I do, Mr. Speaker. I know that I answered a question which I wasn't really listening to when you asked, so what I want to do is be able to give you the correct information. The budget numbers cited are actually not specific to Alberta. We don't know what the amounts will be, as I indicated in my supplementary. I apologize for not giving that correct information.\*

**The Speaker:** The interjection of the chair came about because the chair does not believe that the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has within her administrative requirements or competence knowledge of the federal budget, and that was the reason why.

Now, the rules also say that if a minister chooses to supplement, the person who raised the question gets to ask a supplementary. In this case the person was me, but I'm not going to do it.

### Vignettes from the Assembly's History

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, we have a historical vignette today. Hon. members all know that Alberta's longest serving MLA is Gordon Edward Taylor, who was first elected to the Alberta Legislature on March 21, 1940, and he served to March 14, 1979. That was a total of 38 years, 11 months, and three weeks. But then there's the question of who Alberta's shortest serving member was, and there are actually three ways of defining this.

\*See p. 1343, right col., para. 5

In one way Alberta's shortest serving member is William Morrison. He was elected as a Social Credit MLA in the constituency of Okotoks-High River in the general election held August 22, 1935. He resigned on October 7, 1935, to allow William Aberhart to run in a by-election held November 4, 1935. Aberhart was elected by acclamation. Morrison's length of service was 46 days.

2:40

On July 19, 1921, Percival Baker, a United Farmers of Alberta member for the constituency of Ponoka died. He had been elected in the general election held the previous day, July 18, 1921. Mr. Baker was a member who, unfortunately, was hit in the head by a tree when he was stumping trees several weeks before the election that was held on July 18. He was elected on July 18, was moved from the hospital in Ponoka to the Royal Alexandra hospital in Edmonton, and he died the following day. Mr. Baker's service was less than one day, but he was never sworn in as an MLA. In the by-election held December 9, 1921, J.E. Brownlee was elected by acclamation, and you have heard me make mention of Mr. Brownlee before.

The shortest term of office between election and defeat is another category, and that shortest term of office between election and defeat is held by Don MacDonald, a Liberal elected in a by-election in the constituency of Three Hills on October 26, 1992, following the resignation of Connie Osterman. MacDonald received 46.3 per cent of the vote. In the general election held on June 15, 1993, in the now named constituency Three Hills-Airdrie, the current Member for Airdrie-Chestermere won the seat with 51.2 per cent of the vote. MacDonald received 34.2 per cent of that vote, and his term was seven months, 20 days.

The second shortest term of office between election and defeat is held by Alberta's first elected separatist, Gordon Kesler. Kesler won a by-election held February 17, 1982, in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury caused by the resignation of incumbent Robert C. Clark. He represented the Western Canada Concept and received 42.2 per cent of the vote. In the general election held on November 2, 1982, Kesler ran in another riding, the riding of Highwood, and finished second with 17.9 per cent of the vote. Harry Alger, a Progressive Conservative, won that with 69.9 per cent of the vote. Kesler's term was less than nine months.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It brings me pleasure to introduce two groups of guests to you and through you to the Assembly. The first is a group of young Edmontonians. Mr. Tyler Harris is a young entrepreneur who has started a travel company here in Edmonton. Along with him is Meghan Humpkey, who is originally from Wetaskiwin but has moved here to work for the last six months before she begins her studies in Edmonton. Also we have Haley Kramer, who is taking some time between travels to Mexico and Europe but will be beginning her studies at Grant MacEwan College this fall. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

Also, Mr. Speaker, with us today is Mr. Chuck Temraz. Mr. Chuck Temraz originates from Lebanon but is a constituent of mine. Mr. Temraz is quite renowned in his community as he is the first

ever to translate the works of Plato and other philosophers from the English language into the Arabic language. His books have now been donated to libraries throughout Alberta and are used as text and reference materials throughout the Middle East. I'll ask Mr. Temraz to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ellen Parker and Reka Serfozo. Reka Serfozo worked in Canada World Youth for the past four years as a project supervisor and program officer supporting international youth exchanges in eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Ellen is a community activist, global educator, and former federal candidate for the New Democrats in Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I would ask them both to rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

### Liberation of the Netherlands

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to mark the anniversary of the end of the military occupation and oppression of a nation and the start of an international friendship which has lasted 60 years. On May 10, 1940, Nazi forces crossed the border in an invasion which began five years of occupation of the Netherlands and the oppression of the Dutch people.

Mr. Speaker, my parents had already immigrated to the province by the time war broke out in Europe for the second time. However, many members of my extended family were subjected to Nazi rule during the occupation of the Netherlands. While the Dutch resistance waged a continuous and mostly peaceful campaign to resist being assimilated by the occupiers, they were by themselves unable to convince the Nazis to leave Holland. They needed assistance. This assistance was provided in the form of the First Canadian Army. The strength of this army varied from anywhere between 200,000 to over 400,000 troops when adding the British, Polish, American, Belgian, and Dutch fighting men to the roughly 150,000 Canadian soldiers. While the size of the army varied, their resolve and determination never wavered and was never questioned.

May 5 marked the 61st anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands by the Allied forces. This was the culmination of a nine-month campaign to free Holland from Nazi occupation. The battles to free the Netherlands were difficult in the extreme, complicated by the nature of the geography of the area. The Allied troops were forced to battle through wet and boggy conditions of the lowlands and the tenacity of their opponent. However, the First Canadian Army stayed the course, and after securing a truce in late April, which allowed food relief to be brought in to a starving populace, the Allied army accepted the unconditional surrender of the occupying force on May 5, 1945.

Friendship between our two countries was cemented that day, a friendship which has been forged in the fire of the battlefield and tempered with the jubilation of victory. This friendship is still strong today, evidenced by the gifts of tulips which are sent to our nation's capital from the Dutch people. I would ask all hon. members to join me in recognizing the sacrifices which were made and the bonds that were formed.

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

### Fire Tragedy Averted

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes you don't know when you will be called upon to act quickly and think on your feet. Monday of last week something truly incredible happened not too far away from our Legislature. I was walking to an event with my legislative assistant, who is also more affectionately known as my shadow, when a car pulled up, billowing steam and smoke. Now, we all assumed that the engine was overheating and that the lady in the car would call a tow truck and get the problem sorted out. Luckily for her my leg. assistant noticed the flames spitting out of the undercarriage of the vehicle. He quickly, without a moment of hesitation, ran over to the van and opened the door to ensure that the driver got out of the vehicle in a safe manner and distanced herself from the car. Moments later the van's engine burst into flames and began whipping up the windshield. Two of our colleagues, the hon. Member for Peace River and the hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, secured a fire extinguisher and tried unsuccessfully to extinguish the fire. Meanwhile, my leg. assistant called the Edmonton fire department, and they arrived within a timely four-minute response to the emergency call and extinguished the flames that were now threatening the surrounding area.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes you must be prepared to react quickly to a situation. You never know when you will have to act. Thanks to the actions of these three people and the Edmonton fire department this situation was resolved without any injury to the lady or the bystanders in the vicinity. I suggest that all members of this House should commend those kinds of actions.

Thank you.

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

### Affordable Housing

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The saying goes, "A rising tide raises all boats." There's a reason why it remains a saying. Sayings, while they usually contain a grain of truth, often cannot be substantiated by the facts. The fact is that the rising tide in this province is raising some boats and swamping others.

In Calgary last Thursday I attended the groundbreaking for 13 affordable housing units to be built on part of the site of the old Highlander Hotel in an initiative put together by the Calgary Community Land Trust Society, Habitat for Humanity, the family of the late Leo and Goldie Sheftel, owners of the Highlander and for whom the complex, Sheftel court, will be named, and Home Depot, which occupies the rest of the old hotel site. The city of Calgary has played a lead role in bringing everyone together to make this affordable housing project possible, but it's like dropping a pebble into the ocean: the ripples are washed away by the rising tide.

A year ago the average resale house price in Calgary was about \$260,000; today it's \$340,000. That and the steady inflow of newcomers is quickly tightening up the supply of rental housing as well. After six years in which the vacancy rate was in the 5 to 6 per cent range, a range that holds the line on rents, in the last six months the vacancy rate has dropped to 1.6 per cent, and rents have climbed anywhere from 3 to 10 per cent.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, half the homeless people in Calgary have full-time jobs. Every night of the week homeless families bed down in a church basement somewhere in Calgary through the Inn from the Cold program. I know of no city in Canada with as many people as committed and as innovative in their many approaches to solving the homelessness crisis as Calgary has. But what Calgary doesn't have

and cannot do on its own, not with all the imagination and goodwill its people possess, is create enough affordable housing, and as rents go up, there's even less to go around.

Portable housing allowances and rent supplements would be a start, but the province needs to step up to the plate now with a land-use strategy, a budget to build affordable housing, and a program to focus on getting this shameful problem solved. It's unthinkable that a province this wealthy would not make affordable housing for all its residents an absolute priority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### God's Masterpiece School Play

**Mrs. Jablonski:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is the mark of a great performance when the actors on stage are so powerful that they help the audience to completely share in their joy and their sorrow. When the men and women in an audience are wiping away tears and when they are laughing together in joy, they are transcended from their daily life for one brief moment and are part of the greater drama being enacted on stage. You may have experienced this kind of elation in a great performance at the Jubilee Auditorium or the Shaw Festival in New York or even in Stratford-upon-Avon.

However, Mr. Speaker, the outstanding performance that I am speaking of is the work of the grade 4 and grade 5 students of St. Martin de Porres elementary school in Red Deer. St. Martin is a fine arts school that teaches skills that help each child to develop their full potential in the arts. Although you might think that I'm partial because this is a school in Red Deer and has my granddaughter in the kindergarten class, I can sincerely and unequivocally say that I was totally immersed in the performance entitled *God's Masterpiece*. These children performed so well that I had to continually remind myself that the young actors that I was watching were only nine and 10 years old and not even in junior high yet.

*God's Masterpiece* is a two-act play that tells the story of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. The teachers and staff of St. Martin worked very hard and many long hours to coach each child, to produce the great costumes and stage sets, and to hold a silent auction and reception to help pay for the costs of this excellent performance.

Mr. Speaker, my sincerest congratulations go out to the producers of *God's Masterpiece*, teacher Justin Flunder and principal Patricia MacRae-Pasula, to the staff that dedicated many hours to work with the children, to the parents that helped to organize the reception and silent auction, and to the entire cast of incredible students who played their roles so magnificently. The death and resurrection of the Lord may indeed be God's masterpiece, but as I watched these very young children rise to a level of performance that far exceeded the normal age and maturity levels of grades 4 and 5 students, I watched them perform with their hearts and souls, and I saw that each child was truly one of God's great masterpieces.

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

### Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month

**Mr. Lougheed:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon in recognition of MS Awareness Month. Since the 1970s the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada has marked the month of May as MS Awareness Month. This campaign offers the opportunity for MS Society volunteers and staff to complete public awareness and fundraising activities nationally and locally.

The MS carnation campaign is one such event. The carnation campaign has traditionally been an important component of the MS Society's spring fundraising season. This campaign offers Canadians the opportunity to raise funds for MS research and services by purchasing carnations from volunteers in their local communities. Since its inception in 1975 the MS carnation campaign has been highly successful, providing more than \$30 million for multiple sclerosis research and services for Canadians with MS.

Mr. Speaker, MS is an unpredictable and often disabling disease of the central nervous system. MS can cause loss of balance, impaired speech, extreme fatigue, double vision, and paralysis. It's a disease that affects people of all ages. Canada has one of the highest MS rates in the world, and each day three more Canadians are diagnosed with MS. The cause of MS is not yet known, and there is no cure, but there is hope. Purchasing a carnation during the MS carnation campaign could help the MS Society come one step closer to finding the cure for multiple sclerosis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### Sale of Surplus Crown Lands

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a historical vignette today even if some of the history on the purchase prices for the ring road lands around Edmonton and Calgary is yet to be written. Alberta taxpayers have lost millions of dollars due to this Progressive Conservative government's mismanagement of the purchase and subsequent sale of surplus ring road land in Edmonton and Calgary. By spinning the facts, making excuses, and pointing the finger at others, the government continues to try and suppress the truth.

Documents show that this Progressive Conservative government has given away and continues to give away prime residential land at fire-sale prices. Some parcels were sold at well below the market value, while other parcels were given away for pennies per acre. Just last week the minister failed to provide an explanation for a land sale in 2002 that cost taxpayers \$2.3 million in losses. In another case, several PC Party faithful were able to make a huge profit by flipping land to the government, which paid more than 15 times what their political supporters had paid for the land. A great deal for the Tories, a horrible deal for taxpayers. Still no answers are given.

The minister responsible for land sales tries to deflect the issue. However, it was not this government or this opposition that dragged the late Mr. Shekter's name through the mud. It was not the Official Opposition. It was this government's own bank, the Alberta Treasury Branches, that alleges in the statement of claim that the late Mr. Shekter was somehow involved in the payment of \$70,000 in secret commissions to arrange loans between the Treasury Branches and other parties. Now, it wasn't the opposition that said that. It was your own government bank.

There remain so many questions that this government must answer. I don't know if the Auditor General can do it, as the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation states, but perhaps we're going to give him the job. Maybe we should.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, you rose?

**Ms DeLong:** I was rising on a point of order.

**The Speaker:** Well, we'll deal with the point of order at the conclusion.

head:

#### Presenting Petitions

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from 318 Albertans. They

1. urge the government of Alberta to abandon its plans to implement "the Third Way" health care reforms, which will undermine public Medicare;
2. defeat legislation allowing expansion of private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta and permitting doctors to work in both the private and public system, which will drain key resources from the public health care system . . .
4. vote against plans that would force Albertans to pay for private health care insurance for services that should be covered by medicare.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am presenting petitions on behalf of my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. There are several sets here, but there's a total of 1,481 signatures on petitions to urge the government to abandon its plans on the third way, not allow for expansion of private, for-profit hospitals, oppose any action contravening the Canada Health Act, and not allow private payment for health care services.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition to the Assembly from citizens of Alberta who are requesting the Legislature to increase funding "in order that all Alberta Works income support benefit levels . . . be increased."

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

**Mr. Magnus:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to file a petition from 23 staff and students from St. Joe's school in my riding. Essentially, they're asking for concerted government action to address the reported rise in teen smoking in Alberta. They have solutions. The first one is a tobacco tax increase; second, legislation to control tobacco sales and marketing legislation; thirdly, to make all workplaces completely smoke-free.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to table a petition from 42 Albertans from Edmonton, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and St. Albert dealing with the third way and urging us to abandon any plans to privatize health care.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Are there others?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a petition against the third way from 28 residents in Edmonton.

head: 3:00

### Notices of Motions

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I intend to move to adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the immediate jeopardy of seniors and other continuing care residents due to the government's failure to fund and implement adequate care standards.

Thank you.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 30 I'd like to give notice that I will be rising at the appropriate time to move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned to discuss an urgent matter; namely, the failure of the government to take the policy or budgetary steps required to identify the causes and reduce the extraordinary incidence of a variety of health problems, including cancers, among the residents of Fort Chipewyan and area.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Just so that all members are aware of this, we have two Standing Order 30 applications, we have notice from the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow to rise on a point of order, and the House wishes to advise that there is going to be another point of order that will come after the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow's point of order.

Hon. members, the chair received a letter from the Official Opposition House Leader on May 3 concerning early consideration of Bill 208 at the Committee of the Whole stage. The Opposition House Leader tabled the letter in the Assembly last Thursday, May 4, as per an invitation from the chair. The Opposition House Leader was also to convey a copy of that letter to other House leaders in the House, and there is nodding there saying that that was done. That letter is recorded as Sessional Paper 476/2006. The request from the Member for Foothills-Rocky View for the early consideration of Bill 208 at the Committee of the Whole stage was tabled by the chair in this Assembly last Wednesday, May 3, and it's recorded as Sessional Paper 469/2006.

Usually a letter from a member to the Speaker is responded to with a letter. However, in this case the chair finds the issue to be so important to members that the chair invites this to be treated as a point of order this afternoon. I repeat: sessional papers 476/2006 and 469/2006, all recorded and delivered last week.

So we will deal with that matter after we deal with the point of order from the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, then we will deal with the Standing Order 30 application of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and then the Standing Order 30 application of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

head:

### Introduction of Bills

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

#### Bill 40

#### Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to request leave to introduce Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, 2006, for first reading.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 40 is simple enabling legislation. This amendment will allow us to implement a new tuition fee policy this fall as promised. The amendment does not contain the policy itself, so I wanted to be clear on that. The new tuition fee policy will flow out of the A Learning Alberta review, which is due and expected very,

very soon. The proposed amendment will allow for revisions to the current tuition fee regulation so that new guidelines can be implemented for tuition fee increases among all postsecondary institutions governed by the policy in time for the fall of 2007.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 40 read a first time]

**The Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf.

#### Bill 41

#### Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act

**Mr. Stevens:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon, on behalf of the Minister of Finance, to request leave to introduce Bill 41, the Unclaimed Personal Property and Vested Property Act. This being a money bill, His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This bill will establish a primary repository and claims system for the unclaimed or abandoned personal property of Albertans consistent with recommendations by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. It will also establish a clear process for managing and resolving issues relating to property that vests in the Crown when a corporation is dissolved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a first time]

head:

### Tabling Returns and Reports

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often that I table letters, but I have quite an accumulation, so I'll dispose of them all in one shot. One is from Mr. Dennis Loughlin. He advises us that there is a proliferated use of foreign licences and that an increased number of Albertans are driving now under foreign licences.

Another one, Mr. Speaker, is from Larry Marcotte, and he's writing relevant to the standards of subsidized housing in our province.

Another one, Mr. Speaker, is from Mr. J.B. Struthers, and he indicates that the Alberta government's decision to have only one licence plate on a vehicle as opposed to two has resulted in a higher cost of law enforcement.

Another one, Mr. Speaker, is from Mr. Marlowe, who is providing us with a summary of minutes from the most recent annual general meeting of Seniors United Now.

Mr. Speaker, another one is written by Ms Deanne Friesen, who is raising some objections relevant to the most recent PDD budget.

The last one, Mr. Speaker, is written by Ms Maria Marrazzo, who is raising some concerns relevant to long-term care.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Minister of Energy, do you have some something to table?

**Mr. Melchin:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table six copies of responses to questions asked by hon. members during the Committee of Supply debate of 2006-07 for the estimates of the Ministry of Energy.

**The Speaker:** I saw a great number of hands. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a series of tablings today, and I'll be quick. These documents are in regard to questions I asked last Thursday in the Assembly. The first one is the map of the Edmonton transportation and utility corridor.

The second one is a letter dated May 4 in regard to the Report of the Auditor General on Alberta Social Housing Corporation – Land Sale Systems. This is land sales in Fort McMurray. It's directed to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

The third document is the Alberta Government Services land titles office. This is the transfer of land agreement for the Royal Development Corporation's purchase of land in and around the ring road in Edmonton, and this is the land title certificate from that transfer of sale.

This is a document to support my private member's statement today, and it's dated December 10, 1979. It's an interoffice memo, and it's in regard to the purchase of land in the Edmonton greenbelt.

My next tabling is the *Alberta Gazette*, part 1, from March 31, 2003, indicating the land sold and the purchase price that we talked about in question period earlier.

My last tabling is from the January 31, 2003, *Alberta Gazette*, part 1. It's also about the sale or disposition of land by the department of infrastructure, and it is regarding my question today earlier.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate copies of five of the many letters I've received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens. These letters voice concerns surrounding continued funding by the province for child care under Alberta's five-point investment plan. The letters I'm tabling today are from David Hwang, Tracy Lee, Robin and Jennifer Clee, Ivonnie Joy Abes, and Wendy Patton and Rob Lutzer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. The first is an individual letter from Derek Jassman of Calgary, writing to the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. He is a live-in caregiver for an individual. He's writing in response to the minister's request to keep sending her letters. The points he's raising are that the residential funding of the man who hires him has been cut by 1.9 per cent this year, and the new support home model coming into effect will likely further erode that funding. He makes the point that the supports that he provides on a daily basis are continually being devalued and undermined by decisions made by the government.

The second is similar letters written by individuals regarding funding of adults with developmental disabilities. The funding is not meeting the staff wage increases and making it difficult to hire and retain those staff. These similar letters are sent by Rhonda Fuhr, Robert Webb, Judith Da Silva, Jeff Shuman, Julie Sinner, Carol Rutherford, Tracy O'Reilly, Caroline Berezowski, Erin Buhr, and Anca Daroban.\*

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of seven of the letters that I've

received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens pressing for continued funding by the province for child care under Alberta's five-point investment plan. They're from Maryn and Claudio Milazzo, Sharlene Claerhout and Ken Boyko, Sebastian and Ellen Maurice, Roberto and Michelle Benzan, Carole and Kevin Broger, Kathleen Fraser and Stacey Radley, and Tracey and John Woo.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of letters to table today. The first is a letter from Ruth Adria, who's with the Elder Advocates of Alberta Society. She's trying to find out definitive information in regard to the process of assessing the care needs of residents in long-term care. She wants to know what instrument is used by the resident care manager to determine residents' care classification levels and how much nursing care time is required for each level.

Next I have a letter from Dick and Susan Burgman, who are parents of a developmentally disabled daughter. They are concerned that despite a massive surplus in the province's budget, a segment of the population is being targeted by shortages in PDD funding.

I also have a letter from Alan Braithwaite. Mr. Braithwaite is a recipient of PDD funding who is concerned that funding shortages will leave him unable to perform his volunteer work at the Food Bank.

Next is a letter from Melody Slobozian, who is saddened that she has to write in support of people with developmental disabilities. She believes that adequate funding should be provided to help such individuals move forward in their lives.

I also have copies of a letter from Colleen Ross. She's worried that her PDD-funded worker will not be able to help her with banking, cooking, shopping, paperwork, and other important activities.

Next is a letter from Marilyn Ogilvie, who is also worried about shortages to PDD funding. She notes that this will cause serious suffering for many people and make it difficult for them to undertake daily activities.

Similarly, I have a letter from Penny Dana-Vogt. She says that any shortages in PDD funding would severely curtail the progress she has been making.

Sandra DeCecco is also concerned about shortages, and she has written a letter, which I am tabling, expressing those concerns.

Next I have a letter from Joyce Lanz, who is the mother of a disabled son whose programs and quality of life are in jeopardy from the shortages in PDD funding.

Two more, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from Stephanie Alexander. Her brother Scot receives PDD funding and will have a diminished quality of life due to shortages in PDD budgets.

Finally, I have a letter from Jeanne Stuart. She is an 84-year-old volunteer at the Food Bank. She notes that many of the disabled people who also volunteer there have a worker to assist. With PDD funding shortfalls the Food Bank may lose those important volunteers.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four documents to table today. The first is a news release from the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees dated May 4, 2006. In the release the AUPE president notes that the standards announced last week contain

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

“serious flaws.” The key to quality care is sufficient funding to hire appropriate levels of staff.

My second document is a letter from Paul Armstrong of Calgary. Mr. Armstrong is strongly opposed to Bill 208. He feels that the passage will nullify human rights and draw us back to the days of “gay bashing, wife bashing and keeping everyone uneducated and close-minded.”

My third document is an open letter from the Youth Coalition of Canada. They, too, are concerned about Bill 208. They argue that the bill would “allow for hate and prejudice to be protected under the guise of freedom of religion.”

Finally, my last letter is from Canadian Youth for Choice, who are also, not surprisingly, opposed to the passage of Bill 208. The CYC envisions a country with “a universalized standard for sexual and reproductive rights where young people have access to the services and information” that they need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four documents to table today. The first one is a letter that was received in my constituency office last week. It’s by Ms Cinnamon Suyal of Edmonton. Ms Suyal expresses grave concerns about Bill 208. She says that it would “protect people’s right to discriminate,” and she adds that “there is more than enough discrimination in Alberta at present.”

My second document is from a constituent of Edmonton-Strathcona, Dr. Garrett Epp. Dr. Epp is a professor and chair of the English and film studies department at the University of Alberta. He also expresses a great deal of disapproval of Bill 208. He says, “I am appalled by the very idea of Bill 208.” He says that it should be withdrawn immediately because it’s “both misguided and offensive, and an embarrassment to the people of Alberta.”

The third document, Mr. Speaker, is an open letter from Connie Kaldor, James Keelaghan, Mike Robinson, John Russell, and Ian Tyson. These five individuals are urging the government to proceed with announcing the Andy Russell I’tai Sah Kòp park as an integrated wildland and provincial park.

The last document, Mr. Speaker, that I have for tabling today is a news release from the Canadian Union of Public Employees dated May 1, 2006. The release is entitled Federal Budget Won’t Help Parents. The CUPE Alberta president notes in the release that “parents need access to child care that is affordable and high quality,” that “the Harper program of handing out a few bucks [a day] won’t create a single space anywhere in Canada.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first one is a handwritten letter dated March 30, 2006, with respect to Alberta’s health care system from L. Schmode of Red Deer, who blames the Premier and the ruling Conservatives for what ails our system and declares that he no longer supports the Tories.

My second tabling is a copy of a letter sent to the Minister of Health and Wellness dated April 18, 2006, from Ms Rita Calhoun and copied to the Premier, myself, and my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark in which she draws attention to the situation with respect to hospital beds and emergency room overcrowding and the ridiculously long wait times to receive emergency attention or the rushed misdiagnosis in some cases.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three sets of tablings. This afternoon I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of correspondence that I received from Dana Stebner, Shaun O’Brien, Leisa Minter, and Lana Zips outlining their significant concerns regarding the lack of sustainable and adequate funding for PDD service providers and those in their care.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a series of 10 petition letters regarding funding for adults with developmental disabilities. The letters are from Carrie Lewis, Chad Webb, Nicole Moncrieff, Colleen Lisitza, Rolette Sudeyko, Brian Reid, Jeanine Schuller, Stephanie Lee, James Johnson, and Mary Binwag\*.

3:20

My last set of tablings, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of seven of the many letters I have received from concerned parents, daycare owners and staff, and other concerned citizens. These letters voice concerns surrounding continued funding by the province for child care under Alberta’s five-point investment plan. The letters I am tabling today come from Zhiwei Shen and Huafeng Li, Margaret Chan and Peter Boyce, Jennifer Speer and Corin Hopkin, Dawn Hoggett, Ralph Kroll and Suzy Moutinho, Saga H., and Jodie Hayden.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, do you have tablings?

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from a constituent by the name of Gordon Inglis, who writes to express his deep concerns about Bill 208, which is before the House today. He indicates that “a basic feature of a democracy is that minority groups are protected from tyranny by the majority,” and he warns that “history has its lessons.” He’s worried that this may be a step toward tyranny.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday evening last myself and a number of members of this Assembly attended the annual general meeting of Edmonton Airports. I’m pleased today to table the appropriate number of copies of their annual report, in which they indicate a very successful year, with a number of new flights added and all passenger records having been broken.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, do you have tablings?

**Ms Pastoor:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings here today. I’m tabling a letter from a Lethbridge-East constituent, Eleanor Orser, in which she expresses her displeasure about promises broken to local school boards for third-year funding pertaining to class sizes and that assistants are being cut in kindergartens, where classes are sometimes 20 to 1.

Also, I am tabling 10 petition letters regarding funding for adults with developmental disabilities. Funding must at least meet inflation demands, and it’s crucial for the continued progress of these individuals. These letters are signed by Tobias Jeserich, Donna Morneau, Karen Webb, Celena Veltkamp, T. Campeau, D. Allen, Marilyn Borchers, Kristina Mackenzie, Erin Wotherspoon, and Melanie Ellert.

I have 10 further letters regarding funding for adults with developmental disabilities. Proper funding is imperative for proper

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

staffing to ensure a continuity of service and that the care is provided. These letters are signed by Hailey Cramm, Jerilee Jorgensen, S. Hansen, Aref Yosef Abdelhai, Crystal Abbott, R. Robertson, Alice Lau-Kilo, Jynel Christ, Lyndsey Niddrie, and Chelsey Scott.

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

**Mr. Agnihotri:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am tabling nine letters regarding funding for adults with developmental disabilities. These letters are from Susan Swipney\*, Valerie Proudfoot, Trueman Macdonald, Danielle van Loenen, Cecelia Johnston, Kim Johnson, G. Gabrielle, Lonnie Tanner, and Erin Stevens.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three separate tablings. The first one is from a constituent. It's tabling the Lake Wabamun Derailment: Fate and Persistence of the Spilled Oil, a summary on behalf of my constituent David Doull, who also has property along Wabamun.

The second tabling is from constituents George and Doreen Fedoruk, a letter that states that they wrote the health minister regarding the wonderful care and experience that they encountered while being treated in our current health care system and their strong opposition to the two-tiered health care system.

My third and final tabling is from constituent Sheila Hogan regarding the proposed third-way health care framework and her opposition to the two-tiered system as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, did I miss anyone?

That being the case, I'm also going to table with the House today a chart of private members' public bills requests for early consideration from 1997 to 2006. I'm also going to have the pages circulate a copy to all members as it may become pertinent in the discussion of a matter that we'll be dealing with a few minutes from now.

Okay. We now will proceed with, first of all, a point of order from the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

**Ms DeLong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Due to overriding scheduling concerns I'm going to withdraw my point of order today.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Then we'll deal with a situation that the chair alluded to a little earlier. Just to repeat, the chair did receive a letter from the Official Opposition House Leader on May 3 concerning early consideration of Bill 208 at the Committee of the Whole stage. The Opposition House Leader, as per the request of the Speaker, tabled the letter in the Assembly last Thursday, May 4, and also provided copies to various House leaders. This document is recorded as sessional paper 476/2006. The letter arose out of a request from the Member for Foothills-Rocky View for early consideration of Bill 208 at Committee of the Whole stage, that was tabled by the chair on Wednesday, May 3, and is recorded as sessional paper 469/2006.

I repeat again that I indicated that usually letters to the chair are responded to by the chair directly to the letter writer. However, in this case, because it does deal with a matter of private members' business, the chair found the issue to be significant and would ask that it be treated as a point of order and so alerted the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

If she wishes to participate, please proceed. If not, the chair is prepared to give a ruling on this matter.

### Point of Order

#### Private Members' Public Bills

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to bring oral arguments on this particular issue. The Speaker has already outlined the sequence of events, and I won't repeat it. I do note that Standing Order 8(5)(c) sets out that private members' public bills which have passed second reading return to the Assembly for consideration within eight days. That's the rule as it stands. I note that the request letter for early consideration brought forward by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View did not give a reason for the request for early consideration, did not refer to the Standing Orders that it wished to waive, and directed the request directly to the Speaker.

Now, early consideration of Bill 208 in Committee of the Whole would preclude or delay debate on Bill 210, a bill on fixed election dates, sponsored by the Leader of the Official Opposition, which is next in line in the order. As the chair mentioned, this was challenged by me as the opposition House leader. I requested a ruling by the Speaker and asked that the issue of early consideration of private members' public bills be brought to the House by way of a request for unanimous consent to proceed.

I believe there are three issues at play here. One is timing. The second is equality of private members and their business. Finally, the Standing Orders and their position in this House.

On the argument of timing, Mr. Speaker, if we look at the Speaker's ruling from December 1, 2003, which appears in *Hansard* at page 1968, that dealt with a request to hear early consideration of a private member's public bill. The Speaker refers to this situation only happening in the "dying days of a session." To my determination this request for early consideration has happened exclusively in fall sessions as failure to pass a bill would determine that it died on the Order Paper as at December 31, which is what causes the urgency for the private member. So private members who have a bill which has passed second and they believe there's a level of support for it have tried to get their bills debated and passed before the end of the fall session, which has necessitated the waiving of 8(5)(c) and/or 8(5)(d).

Mr. Speaker, this is the spring session, not the fall session. December 31 is a long way off before anything dies on any Order Paper. There has been no formal indication to this House from the government that there would not be a fall sitting. In recent memory there has always been a fall sitting, including the one in December of 1997, which is regarded somewhat specially as the fall sitting focused exclusively on the debate on Canadian unity. But there was a Routine that was held every day. Question period was held. It was a full sitting. I note that the Government House Leader of the day sought unanimous consent from the members of the Assembly to set aside certain Standing Orders for the duration of that fall sitting.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of timing, we're in the spring sitting of the Second Session of the 26th Legislature; therefore, any argument that the Member for Foothills-Rocky View's Bill 208 would die on the Order Paper if not given early consideration, I argue, is unsubstantiated.

3:30

The issue of equality of private members and private members' business. Thus far all private members, and that's including all members of the opposition parties, the independent members, and members of government caucus not holding cabinet posts, have been subject equally to the same rules and processes. This has been noted

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



repeatedly by the Speaker; for example, March 22, 2004, page 617 of *Hansard*.

My request in the spring of 2005 when we were looking at new Standing Orders and OQP rotation on March 8, 2005, *Hansard* pages 90 to 91, to exclude government members from asking questions in QP as they had a different status and different access to ministers than did members of the opposition failed for exactly this argument. The Speaker upheld the equality of all private members. No one kind of private members' business trumps or is superior to any other kind of private members' business.

Arguments were made at one time when a large number of written questions and motions for returns were taking up most or all of private members' day. There was an argument that a limit should be placed on one kind of private members' business to allow for a different kind of private members' business to proceed. That argument failed. Only with unanimous consent of the Assembly was the contemplation of one kind of business adjourned to allow for debate on a different kind of private members' business, and that reference is March 22, 2004.

Finally, the Standing Orders. These are the rules by which we govern ourselves and how we understand the business to proceed. Although we often share certain similarities of processes with others, each Standing Order is unique to their particular jurisdiction and develops along those lines. Our Standing Orders set out the timing of when a private member's bill has passed second, when they then come forward to debate in Committee of the Whole, and further in third.

I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that there are consequences for allowing every request for early consideration. Not every request can be accommodated without some check in place. Otherwise, if every request gets approval to move ahead, we've created chaos, and I think that it makes a mockery of the process to establish the order in the first place.

There's a second argument that the current practice of writing to the Speaker to get early consideration flies in the face of the specific and thorough process of establishing the order of private members' public bills and, further to that, the detailed process which must be followed to switch the order of members in private members' public bills. I'm referring to Standing Order 68.1. Why would we bother laying out such a specific process on how to establish the order and then how to switch the order of members if all one needs to do is ask the Speaker to allow someone to queue-jump over another member, using early consideration of bills at a particular stage? It has the consequence of one member getting their bill past all stages while another member does not get their bill on the floor.

In this case Bill 208 would have received debate in both second and committee before Bill 210, the next bill in line and the bill sponsored by the Leader of the Official Opposition on fixed election dates, gets any debate. It makes Bill 208 more important than Bill 210.

We would like to see Bill 210 get some second reading debate today in part because there's a symposium for democratic renewal coming at the end of the week and a postponement would mean that the content of the bill and the debate could not be considered as any part of the discussion at the symposium.

I note *Marleau and Montpetit*, page 911, where members wish their business to move position. This is talking about an elaborate federal switching scheme. I note that where they wish their business to move position, a process is outlined for the Speaker to follow. Importantly, it requires that the Speaker may only do so with the permission of all members involved and all those who would be affected. I think that's a very important point.

In Alberta the precedent seems to be that simply by virtue of the request being made, the exception is granted. It's unclear who is

giving the permission. It appears to be the Speaker, but I argue that it should be the House. The formal process is set out in the Standing Orders, and therefore any waiving or exceptions or modifications of the Standing Orders should be permitted by members of this Assembly. They are our Standing Orders.

The current Speaker and former Speakers have noted the anomaly of this particular request for early consideration and have requested House leaders and others to propose changes to the process. One example appears in *Hansard*, December 1, 2003, on page 1968.

There are other examples that I can think of where exceptions to Standing Orders come to the House for unanimous consent to proceed. For example, a very common one almost every day is reverting to Introduction of Guests. That's waiving Standing Order 7(1), where the order of the business is set out. That activity takes place at a certain time. The consent allows it to happen at a different time. Second example: where the Speaker seeks the guidance and agreement of the House in allowing the leader of the third party to respond to ministerial statements. A third one: the House's agreement to allow a temporary change, for example, shortening the division bells in second or third, which is Standing Order 32(2). Even recently, on April 26, 2006, page 1087, a member of this House asked permission to extend his speaking time, waiving the Standing Order for speaking time.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that Bill 208 does not meet the test of timing in that we are still in spring session. The urgency to see the bill through all stages quickly does not apply as we still anticipate that there's time in the fall session. There is no valid reason for one private member's public bill to queue-jump over another private member's public bill, all private members being equal, a principle that has been underlined repeatedly by this Speaker. Waiving the Standing Orders does, in every other case I could find, require the matter to be brought before the Assembly and permission to proceed sought from the members through unanimous consent. I would ask that the request for early consideration of Bill 208, sponsored by the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, receive the same treatment and be brought to the floor for unanimous consent to proceed for early consideration of Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much for allowing me to present those oral arguments. I look forward to the Speaker's ruling.

**The Speaker:** Are there other participants? The hon. third party House leader.

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not take a great deal of time. It seems to me that this is a very dangerous precedent. I believe that the only direction is found in Standing Order 9, I think, which states that private members' public bills shall be taken up in order of precedence in order to maintain some certainty. That can mean almost anything.

It seems to me, though, that as private members we're all supposed to be treated absolutely equally here. There's a random draw that goes in. Obviously, we were the big losers this year, but it's fair. It's a random draw. It doesn't matter who comes up for it, whether it's government or opposition to debate those bills. It seems now that this, to me, is a form of getting around this particular bill because, obviously, early consideration is only going to happen when the government members decide that it's going to happen because they have the numbers.

It's not going to happen – I think back to one from the Member for Lethbridge-East, a very important bill, that couldn't pass second reading. So it's very hard to pass second reading. In other words, I'm saying that there'll be two types of private members' bills: those

that are on the government's side, if the government wants them to proceed, and the rest of us will never have them proceed.

I suggest that early consideration like this is unfair because it's only going to be a government member that's going to be able to do this, Mr. Speaker. Here's an important bill coming up from the Leader of the Opposition that should be debated here today. By the fact that the government seems to think that they have the numbers and they can jump the queue, this one would not be debated. Whether there'll be a fall session or not, we're not sure.

I suggest that this whole early consideration could be a fairly serious loophole in terms of the purpose of private members' bills. Perhaps it wasn't meant to be that way, but I think it's becoming that way. So, Mr. Speaker, I really would suggest that you rule and take a look at this because it does have major implications. What's to say, then, that they couldn't get early consideration over almost every bill if there were some opposition bills coming along that they didn't want? I suggest that that would defeat the whole purpose of private members' days. Private members are private members; our bills should all be treated equally. I would suggest that by being able to jump the queue like this, they're not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Other participants? There's nobody from the government? Government House Leader? Deputy Government House Leader?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, the last speaker then.

3:40

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I promise to be very brief. The two speakers ahead of me actually mentioned most of those arguments. I just wanted to quote from *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, sixth edition, 371(3), that says:

The successive stages of bills are Orders of the Day since the House at each stage makes an Order and appoints a date for the consideration of the next stage, and without such Order, the bill cannot be further advanced.

The issue here today, as was mentioned, is not whether the bill appears on the Order Paper for continuance or consideration in the House on a subsequent date. The question is whether a favour is extended to advance a certain bill at the expense of others when no valid reasoning or strong arguments were made to allow it to be expedited or aggressively forwarded. Now, if this is a decision to be made on an exception to the operating rules of this Assembly, by which we all operate and to which we all adhere, I would argue and urge that this then would become a matter to be decided by the Assembly as a whole, and by that I advocate that unanimous consent be sought.

Also, in *Beauchesne* 18(1) it says:

Within the ambit of its own rules, the House itself may proceed as it chooses; it is a common practice for the House to ignore its own rules by unanimous consent. Thus, bills may be passed through all their stages in one day, or the House may decide to alter its normal order of business or its adjournment hour as it sees fit.

Then 18(2) says:

The House is perfectly able to give consent to set aside its Standing Orders and to give its unanimous consent to waive procedural requirements and precedents concerning notice and things of that sort.

So the members of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, can certainly come to a decision whether or not they are prepared to suspend, interrupt, or amend the regular and agreed upon order of business.

I humbly submit that should this matter receive any degree of attention from the Speaker, the question be put as a motion by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View requesting unanimous consent from everyone in this Assembly. I noted with interest the

list of private members' public bills requesting early consideration, that was circulated earlier, for the years 1997 to 2006. I couldn't help but notice that all of them were from private government members. So I couldn't help but think: what would the situation be if this request or this proposal was made by an opposition member? It was mentioned that we all enter into a random draw for private bills and private motions. I don't think that the hon. sponsor of Bill 208 presented such a formidable argument as to the urgency or weight of his request against others that are being discussed here.

With that, I'll take my chair, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, there is no precedent for this outside of this House. This process that we have here in the province of Alberta dealing with private members' bills is found nowhere else in any parliament that follows the British parliamentary system of government. When the Standing Orders of this House were revised in 1993, the most major significant revisions going back to 1905, there were 85-plus revisions.

One of the Standing Order changes had to do with private members' bills. The assumption made by the hon. members at that time, as I recall, was a unanimous decision of the House. I had the privilege of being the Government House Leader who dealt with the Opposition House Leader – his name was Grant Mitchell – and came up with a package, and everybody agreed to them. The purpose was to actually give some meat to private members' bills.

Let me go on. I want to be very clear that this subject of private members' business is treated very, very seriously, but I also want to make sure that all members know the rules as it is something that affects each and every private member. First, I'd like to start with a review of the rules.

Standing Order 8(5)(c) does not say, as the Opposition House Leader suggests in her letter, that a private member's public bill can come up for consideration no earlier than eight sitting days after it receives second reading.

In fact, it is quite the opposite. The section states that "a public Bill other than a Government Bill shall be called in Committee of the Whole within eight sitting days of the day the Bill receives second reading." Accordingly, the bill may be called in committee earlier than eight sitting days after it receives second reading. This distinction is important because the Opposition House Leader suggests in her May 3 letter that the Member for Foothills-Rocky View is asking to waive Standing Order 8(5)(c). He is doing no such thing, and there is no such request in his letter of May 3. His letter asks for early consideration of the bill at committee stage, which, as the chair will explain, is in accordance with the procedure that has been followed.

The Speaker's role in determining the order of business for private members' bills stems from Standing Order 9(1), which states that "all items standing on the Order Paper, except Government Bills and Orders, shall be taken up according to the precedence assigned to each on the Order Paper." The issue for the chair is to determine how to interpret "precedence assigned to each."

Members should know that this issue precedes this Speaker. In his February 11, 1997, ruling Speaker Schumacher outlined a procedure whereby members could request early consideration of their bills. The ruling is found at page 16 of the *Journals* for that date. As the chair believes this is such an important issue, he will repeat part of that ruling.

3. If a Member wants his or her Bill to be considered before the due date, then that Member must make a written request to the Speaker prior to the opening of the House the day before the Member wants the Bill to be considered. For example, if a Member wants a Bill to be considered on a Wednesday . . .

Remember that at the time the ruling was given, private members' business was considered on Tuesdays and Thursdays. That's the reason for: if a member wants a bill to be considered on a Wednesday.

... the letter must be received by the Speaker before the opening of the House on Tuesday on which day the Chair will table the letter;

4. When a Member requests that his or her Bill be considered before its due date, the Bill will be called after debate has concluded on the Private Members' Public Bill that is then before the House or Committee of the Whole assuming that no other Bills have reached their due dates.

Hon. members, this is the procedure by which this Assembly has operated for almost 10 years. There is nothing new here. It's been in existence for 10 years.

We've done some research, and I've had some research conducted on this subject, and we've found that since this 1997 ruling there have been 32 requests for early consideration, not including the one from the Member for Foothills-Rocky View, and I've provided a copy of all of those. Nor does the list contain the request by the Member for Red Deer-North on April 14, 2005, to have her Bill 202 considered at committee stage and third reading stage. The absence of Bill 202 from the list is because the hon. member was requesting that the Assembly consider Bill 202 on a Thursday rather than during the time allotted for private members' public bills on Mondays. To have it considered on a Thursday required unanimous consent, which was granted for both stages.

This chair has commented on this system for considering private members' public bills previously. For instance, on December 1, 2003, at page 1968 of *Hansard* for that day, this chair noted that there were requests for early consideration of bills that might work a hardship on the member who was sponsoring Bill 209 at second reading. The chair noted the procedure for early consideration but stated:

In an effort to ensure that the system is fair and equitable to all members, the chair would welcome suggestions by members and their House leaders over the winter on this issue of early consideration of private members' public bills so that a procedural policy could be put in place for the spring 2004 session, one that would be very clear at the initiation of the session.

It's May – what? – today. No recommendations have since been received, and no changes were suggested to the chair despite the chair's invitation. So the chair today would like to renew the invitation.

In keeping with the established practice, the order of business for private members' public bills today will be Bill 207 in committee as it has reached its due date, followed by Bill 208 in committee pursuant to the sponsor's May 3 request, followed by second reading debate on Bill 210. The chair hopes that this clarifies matters and will look forward to receiving unanimous recommendations from the House leaders with respect to this matter so that we might go forward.

### head: 3:50 Request for Emergency Debate

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview on a Standing Order 30 application.

#### Continuing Care

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising pursuant to Standing Order 30 to request an emergency debate. The motion I submitted to your office this morning reads as follows:

In accordance with Standing Order 30 be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the government's refusal to fully fund and implement the recommendations made by the Auditor General in his May 2005 report on long-term care and

the November 2005 report of the MLA task force puts seniors and other continuing care residents in jeopardy.

I'll be brief in my arguments regarding the motion. First, under Standing Order 30(7) debate "must relate to a genuine emergency." Mr. Speaker, I think that for the countless residents of continuing care centres there is no question that there is an emergency. I'm sure that all the members here have heard the story of 81-year-old Bill Mason this weekend. Mr. Mason's family was dismayed to find that his bandaged feet had apparently been rotting due to complications from diabetes. This is just the latest in a series of allegations of poor treatment in long-term care and continuing care facilities in Alberta. Of course, it is too soon to say who is at fault in this instance, but the point remains that many Albertans are suffering because appropriate standards have not been introduced.

I challenge members in this Assembly to stand and tell us that such suffering is not an emergency. Explain to us why we should sit idly by while these people's health deteriorates. I think their families would also be interested in hearing why this government would like to continue dragging its feet on this issue. In terms of urgency, Mr. Speaker, I would remind members that tomorrow is the one-year anniversary of the release of the Auditor General's special report on this matter – one year – and one year for many of these people in a very vulnerable situation is a lifetime.

At the time of the release there were many crocodile tears shed and many promises that the situation would be immediately remedied, that relief would be offered. The Minister of Health and Wellness even speculated at the time that \$250 million would be needed to implement the recommendations, and she would immediately begin to work at getting those funds and proper standards in place. Almost a year for standards that have already been condemned by seniors' advocates and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees is simply not good enough. We cannot wait another day to discuss this matter and hold both the Minister of Health and Wellness and the minister for seniors accountable. As an Assembly we need to debate steps that can be taken immediately.

I would like to point out that the other conditions for allowing a debate in this matter as they are laid out in Standing Order 30(7) have also been met. I have spoken to (a), that the matter must be "a genuine emergency," and I think we can agree that relieving ongoing suffering is an issue of immediate concern. In (b) it says that not more than one motion shall be dealt with on a particular day. I know that there have been a couple of other motions, at least one other today, but none of them have been dealt with yet. In (c) it notes that only one matter may be dealt with on the same motion. I think that this condition has clearly been met. We want to discuss standards for continuing care. It's very simple. In (d) it urges that the motion should not revive a previous discussion of such a motion. I don't believe such a motion has been brought before the House in this matter in this session, Mr. Speaker.

Further, we haven't had and are not likely to have any other opportunity to thoroughly discuss this matter. The proposed standards were quietly announced last week. There was an Auditor General's report last year, as I mentioned, and an MLA task force report earlier this year, but this is the first time we have been able to discuss specific proposals from the government. In fact, I would point out that debate on the two relevant ministries' budget estimates, which would have been an excellent time to discuss this, has already passed.

Now, the ministers knew that we would be debating estimates, and they knew that these standards are urgently important. The point is that we finally have concrete standards, insufficient though they are, but no piece of legislation and no budget to debate. I cannot see any other way to deal with this matter than for you to rule in favour of

the motion's urgency and put the question to the Assembly as to whether we ought to hold the debate. Mr. Speaker, a year from now is not good enough. A year for some of these people in very vulnerable situations is their lifetime, and I would suggest that for that reason this is an emergency.

**The Speaker:** Under Standing Order 30 provisions the chair can allow certain participants. Could I have some idea as to how many hon. members would like to participate under Standing Order 30? Well, I think we're going to have to perhaps limit it to two from each grouping, then, if that's the case.

Opposition House Leader, proceed.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to support my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in his Standing Order 30 motion. He has laid out the arguments about urgent importance, which appears as *Beauchesne* 387 and, I would also add, *Marleau and Montpetit* 584, which is requiring urgent consideration. I think that in this instance it is an emergency because the health and safety of seniors continues to be in peril. Just Friday there was another allegation of neglect at another Edmonton continuing care facility. So this is not on hold by any means.

The standards that were released by the government on May 3 have no monitoring or compliance provisions in them that are enforceable at this point, so they offer no immediate solution to and are inadequate to protect the seniors that we have in care. According to what the government laid out at the time, there is no legislation coming forward on this particular issue that might give some weight to that monitoring and enforcement of compliance until a year from now, in 2007.

This session is coming to an end sometime in the next few weeks or a month or so. I do not see any bills on the Order Paper or any notice of bills that could address this issue. We do not appear to have any other opportunity for immediate resolution. The motions other than government motions deadline passed a couple of weeks before we started this spring session, so the ability of private members to bring a motion forward on this subject has passed.

This particular issue around the standards has come up since we came into session. The issue is indeed within the administrative competence of government. It is not currently before the courts in the form in which we are debating it at the moment. There is no other reasonable opportunity for debate. Questions in question period are not giving us the length of time and the depth of discussion to pursue it. We believe, following on *Beauchesne* 388, that it is pressing enough that the public interest will suffer if it is not addressed, and because of the recurring episodes the requirement under *Beauchesne* 389 of a genuine emergency – we believe that test has been met.

This, I would argue, is not a chronic condition. It is a resolvable one. So the cautions that are found in *Marleau and Montpetit* 585 I believe do not pertain specifically to this issue.

I appreciate the opportunity to add those arguments in support of the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's Standing Order 30 application. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, we're dealing with arguments under Standing Order 30 dealing with urgency, not the subject.

4:00

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to that urgency, about this motion pursuant to Standing Order 30 that was brought forward this afternoon because I do believe, too, that it's an

important issue. We are making progress and I'd like you to know that. I don't believe that this is an urgent matter that requires the adjournment of our ordinary Assembly business.

As you know as well, Mr. Speaker, I've spoken in the Assembly before about the number of facilities that we have in long-term care. There are 200 continuing care facilities, around 400 supportive living facilities, including lodges and designated assisted living facilities, and when you consider the entire continuing care system, it provides care and support to around 100,000 Albertans.

It was just this past Wednesday that we took a significant step forward, I believe, by implementing new standards for health and accommodation services in continuing care. Given that announcement last week and the significant new funding that has been invested within the past three months, Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that this motion suggests that there's a crisis in the continuing care system that is not being addressed, and that clearly is not the case.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that we've mentioned before the dollars. That's very much what this motion is about: funding and the implementation of these standards that we just announced on Wednesday. Both ministries, Health and Wellness and my ministry, committed \$36 million originally, and that's significant funding. Also, in estimates we've brought forward an amount of funding which was another \$72 million added to that, funding which is in place to address this motion that's before you, and we have appropriations coming forward once again.

To talk about these standards, the implementation of the standards we have for the accommodation side in our area . . .

**The Speaker:** With all due respect, please. The debate this afternoon is about the urgency; it's not the subject. The subject could be anything. The question now is: why should we abrogate the Routine for the rest of the afternoon to discuss this matter? The subject could be anything. We're on Standing Order 30.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the subject could be anything, but I guess that it's just near and dear to my heart, and I know that we have met what this Standing Order 30 is about regarding the funding and the standards. We've met the funding, and we have implemented the standards. The standards that were implemented in my ministry will cover entirely the whole system of care.

**The Speaker:** I indicated that there would be three. Would there be additional members who would like to participate? Three. Is that enough then? I'm going to give fairness here.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka on the Standing Order 30. This is not the subject of this. It's the urgency of the matter.

**Mr. Prins:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to address this motion. I believe also that an emergency debate on continuing care is not necessary today.

The hon. member from Calgary and myself co-chaired the task force last year. We dealt with a number of these issues. Many issues came up, but one of them was staffing. There was always the concern that there was not enough staff in these facilities, and one of our recommendations was to immediately increase the level of staffing. This has been done. In February Health and Wellness dedicated over \$15 million to health authorities to reach 3.4 hours of personal care per day, so this is being dealt with. This year's budget saw much more money allocated to increase hours as well as to increase numbers of therapy and activity program staff. All in all, Mr. Speaker, care hours for continuing care residents have increased by 20 per cent since 2004, so there is much work being done.

Training was also an issue that was raised by Albertans as the task force did its work. Health care aides provide a large amount of the care to residents, and it is essential that they not only have the compassion but the technical training needed to help ensure a high quality of care for residents. So the hon. minister has informed me that her department . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, please. That's the speech you would give if, in fact, the House agreed to have the debate. We're still dealing with the question: should we have the debate? Anybody else want to deal with that matter?

Okay. Last speaker then.

**Mr. Mason:** Fair enough, Mr. Speaker. I wish to address the question of the urgency of this debate, and it's connected, I'm afraid, with what the government has done or, rather, what the government has not done. The government did promise a year ago to implement all of the standards recommended by the Auditor General, who took a very thorough and careful look at this question and came forward with what we thought were very, very adequate recommendations. The government's announcements, even the ones recently as they approach the one-year anniversary, have fallen short of what the Auditor General has called for.

**The Speaker:** Again, with all due respect, please. It's the same argument that I have addressed to the previous two speakers. We're dealing with the urgency, setting aside the time this afternoon. The issue, as I repeat, can be anything. Okay? So don't even mention the issue.

**Mr. Mason:** Okay. I promise.

Mr. Speaker, the urgency relates to the conditions under which people are living right now which may affect their health and their very life. That is why it is urgent. That is why the failure to implement, for example, the specific unannounced, outside, independent investigation by people qualified to do so of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities is extremely urgent. If it doesn't happen, we don't know whether or not the conditions have changed, and if we don't know that, people may die. In fact, there are cases where people have died because they have not been properly cared for in our institutions. Therefore, it is of the utmost urgency that we debate this question. Had the government fully implemented all of the recommendations of the Auditor General, I do not believe it would be urgent, but they didn't, so it is.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you very much. It is not the subject that's the urgency. The urgency is whether or not there's another opportunity in the House to discuss the matter. That's what the urgency is, not the subject. The subject can be anything. Does this House have another opportunity to raise any matter associated with the subject at hand? If, in fact, there was agreement that there was no other opportunity, then a decision would be made, and the whole agenda would in essence be done away with.

I'm going to repeat again that the relevant parliamentary authorities on the topic of emergency debates are *Beauchesne's*, paragraphs 387 to 398 – I'm sure all speakers who participated had *Beauchesne* in front of them – and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 587, 589. The chair has reviewed these references closely in considering this request for leave and must emphasize to all members that to meet the requirements for urgency – again I repeat – there must not be another opportunity for the members of the Assembly to discuss the matter. To be very specific, again,

paragraph 390 in *Beauchesne's*, and page 589 in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

Just a few days ago in this Assembly the chair ruled a request for an emergency debate out of order and at the time noted for all members that although the estimates of the relevant department had already been voted upon, there appeared another opportunity for debate when the appropriation bill for the budgets for all ministries and departments would come before the House for consideration. That same principle applies today with respect to this application. The chair has no idea, no knowing how long this session is going to go on. The chair has no idea, no knowing many bills will be forthcoming or not forthcoming. The chair does know that no budget can be approved without appropriation bills. The chair has scheduled his schedule to mid-July in anticipation that there are going to be one or two more question periods and one or two more other things.

I don't want to detract at all from the importance of the issue. Please. That's not the question at stake here, and I repeat it again and again and again because 83 members all have their own important issues. The question about urgency has to do with opportunity for members to discuss the matter, not the subject. Sorry. The request for leave is not in order.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in making his statement quoted something from Standing Orders. He basically said that Standing Order 30(7)(b) says that "not more than one . . . motion may be proceeded with on the same day" in anticipation that no other subject could be discussed. The fact of the matter is that to this point in time no motion has been proceeded with as of yet.

#### head: 4:10 Request for Emergency Debate

**The Speaker:** I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to proceed with her motion.

#### Health Issues in Fort Chipewyan

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Urgency. I have put forward a motion, which has been circulated, that under Standing Order 30 we adjourn the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly to discuss an important matter, which is the failure of the government to take the policy or budgetary steps required to identify the causes and reduce the extraordinary incidence of a variety of health problems, including cancers, among the residents of Fort Chipewyan and area.

There is certainly a question under the public interest provisions that appear in *Beauchesne* 388 in support of adjourning this business to talk about this. What we have here is a medical examiner in a community who is noting that residents are experiencing a very high disease rate, and there are a number of illnesses that have been diagnosed in this particular quite small community, 1,200 people. Now, there was a report released in 1999 recommending more monitoring, but there's been very little action taken on that. The minister today, in speaking in response to a question from the Leader of the Official Opposition on this issue, had noted that her actions since 1999 had been speaking to CBC in a radio interview on this particular subject.

We do have Dr. O'Connor, who is the medical officer in that community, requesting an investigation by Health Canada, and no response has been received, Mr. Speaker. None of the cancer funding that was announced this year was targeted toward that particular issue. These issues are why it's urgent and why it's of public interest. Nothing else has fallen into place to protect people.

We've had a cut in the aboriginal health strategies. The minister said that really this was federal funding, and we weren't going to

prop it up anymore. The point of the matter is that funding was withdrawn from a community that was suffering some severe health problems.

We have tried to get to the bottom of this question in question period, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it was our number one question today, which tells you the importance at which we place it. But a 45-second exchange is, frankly, not enough to delve into the issues that are before us.

I note that the debate on the Department of Health and Wellness and on Environment have both taken place, and the opportunity for us to bring this issue forward in another venue such as motions other than government motions or private members' public bills: those deadlines have both passed for us. We have tried through question period to get resolution, unsatisfactorily. Those options for us to pursue this matter have passed or were not able to be successful.

I agree with the Speaker that there is no end in sight for the session, and there may well be other opportunities but not through any of the forums that I have examined. The written questions and motions for returns deadlines at this point, if submitted, would not be coming forward to the floor for another three weeks, given the timing of that particular process. That puts us three weeks off, and we have people with cancer being diagnosed almost on a weekly basis.

I argue that according to *Beauchesne* 387 it does require urgent consideration given these substantial health issues. It is within the administrative competence of this government. They do provide funding. They're certainly responsible for water quality and other associated issues with this issue; therefore, it is within their administrative competence. The issue is not before the courts at the moment, Mr. Speaker. As I've argued, no other reasonable opportunity for a debate.

It, I think, could be argued under *Beauchesne* 389 as a genuine emergency, but also argued under *Marleau and Montpetit* 585 that it is "immediately relevant and of attention and concern throughout the nation." Further under M and M 585 I don't believe that this could be put in the same category as a chronic issue such as a constitutional matter, which is one of the definers that is given to us in M and M.

With that, I believe that we have met the test on urgency and opportunity to find other ways to debate this particular issue. We are seeing immense concern in the community around a lack of opportunity to take substantive steps to address this. I ask that the Speaker find in favour of our Standing Order 30 application.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak to the issue of urgency, as you have so often reminded us in this House, and not to the issue. I say that because to summon urgency that would otherwise require the House to adjourn all other business before it would suggest that there is no other opportunity in the foreseeable future to address this issue, and that's simply not the case. I can confirm to the House that we are not expecting the House to adjourn today, nor are we expecting the House to adjourn tomorrow, nor are we expecting the House to adjourn, for that matter, any time this week and, perhaps, not even next week. Who knows? We don't know. But it's not going to be in the next few days for sure. That having been said, there will be additional opportunities forthcoming very quickly on the two main points that this Standing Order 30 suggests: one dealing with policy and the other dealing with budgetary steps.

Now, on the issue of policy there will be presumably several question periods. Opposition and other members may wish to use

that opportunity to ask the appropriate minister what the policies are and what steps are in motion. For example, today the hon. minister of health did indicate in response to the question that many things are happening, including, Mr. Speaker, the fact that Alberta Health and Wellness in collaboration with representatives from Health Canada, the Alberta Cancer Board, First Nations, and other stakeholders is already investigating these claims that cancer and other disease rates may be higher in the Fort Chipewyan area as compared with other parts of the province. So it's not as if nothing is being done, and I'd like the House to have some comfort on that.

Secondly, with respect to urgency as it applies to the budgetary aspect, there will be, of course, an appropriation bill brought in as soon as the budget estimates are concluded later this week, and I would suggest that probably that appropriation bill will come in sometime next week, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, it will go through all three proper stages, including the Committee of the Whole stage, and there will be ample opportunity to address both the budgetary aspect as it relates to the Health and Wellness department or to any other department of government and also some of the policies that back that up. So there will be those opportunities. There's also private members' statement time at which point other points could be raised.

So I would submit that there are at least those additional opportunities during which time this issue can well be brought up and can be appropriately brought up and responded to and addressed by the government. On that basis, I would ask that the chair consider those points as it rules on whether or not this does constitute urgency or not.

**The Speaker:** The chair will hear one additional argument, though, from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I would be interested in speaking strictly to the urgency of this matter. I think that we have a situation where it's a combination of the circumstances weighing in with a factor of the timeliness of this. Considering how cancer and some of these very rare diseases develop and how they come from contact to fruition, combined somehow with the limited time that we have to specifically deal with this circumstance, compels me to suggest that my hon. colleague's motion that the failure of the government to take policy or budgetary steps to identify the causes to reduce the extraordinary incidence of a variety of health problems in the Fort Chip area would suggest that we do in fact have some reasonable grounds for urgent debate.

4:20

The two areas that I would like to cite and provide some illumination in regard to this specific matter first come from *Beauchesne's* 387. *Beauchesne's* 387 specifically deals with the lack of any other opportunity to deal with a specific circumstance. My research and understanding of what lies before us, even if we are in fact booking into July for this spring session, is the fact that the most relevant ministries' budgets have been debated and passed already, Health being one and Environment being the other. As well, the idea or the concept that the hon. House leader opposite brought forward that we could perhaps deal with this in question period – it seems to me that the question period format that we have is more for very specific issues and for later consideration, while urgent issues can otherwise pass by with great speed.

As I said, the other factor that we have here is the contact and the development of these various diseases, which is an ongoing issue. Certainly, I note that John O'Connor, the medical examiner for Fort Chipewyan, was suggesting that some of these diseases that he was identifying as relatively regular occurrences up there were things

that he would not expect to see as a physician more than once in his entire lifetime. So seeing four or five or six of these in a population of 1,200 or less, at least compels us, I think, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that there is an extraordinary circumstance going on there. If I use the case of asbestosis as an example, you don't see any visible effects of that particular carcinogenic contact until 30 years after the contact. So if we're starting to see a flowering or a blooming or a blossoming of these various fatal cancers, then I should expect that, you know, that in itself constitutes an emergency to some degree.

The other circumstances for opportunities that we have here in this House to deal with this include written questions, but my understanding of the written questions system, as we use it here, is that we have the deadline and then the time that expires between that time. I could see us not being able to really deal with this effectively for at least three weeks, perhaps a month, which again would put us into sometime where it would be less clear if we were still sitting here.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the other circumstance that I would bring up in no uncertain terms is *Beauchesne* 389, which does speak about a genuine emergency. Again, I would suggest that people dying in a concentrated form around cancer cases would in fact constitute a genuine emergency that we could deal with almost immediately. Considering that Bill 1 was our flagship bill that we brought forward here this spring, I think we have a circumstance here that is tragic but also provides a lot of scientific opportunity, and I think that we must act upon it immediately.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Thank you very much.

Nobody mentioned – I have no idea why. When I look at the Order Paper, Votes and Proceedings – this is actually a pretty good document. We have this process on Thursdays where the Opposition House Leader stands up and is given the right to ask a question of the Government House Leader as to what the agenda will be for the next week. This whole subject is about urgency and opportunity or lack thereof to participate in something. I look on page 8 of Votes and Proceedings of Thursday, May 4; Wednesday, May 10, main estimates, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Now, as far as I understand, Fort Chipewyan is in northern Alberta, and most – not all – of the people who live there are aboriginal. It seems to me that if we were to approve today to deal with this special motion, we'd have one hour and five minutes. This estimate on Wednesday was designated by the Official Opposition. That's another privilege given to look ahead. You can spend two whole hours on this subject matter.

So once again we go back to the urgency and the opportunity, and that's only one of the opportunities. Other opportunities have been mentioned. Again, I am not minimizing the subject matter, and please don't anybody interpret that because that's not what the rules are. Sometimes when you're a referee, you have to, you know, take it from the big guys too. In this case the chair is not going to put the question because he does not believe the request for leave is in order.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, proper notice having been given on Thursday, May 4, I am pleased to now move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24.

[Motion carried]

## Alberta Sport Plan

Q16. Mr. R. Miller moved on behalf of Mr. Agnihotri that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 what measures has the Ministry of Community Development taken to meet the funding challenges associated with supporting provincial sports and recreational programs as detailed by the Alberta Sport Plan Task Force in their report *A New Century for Amateur Sport: From Participation to Excellence*?

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is very clearly a very important issue for the Alberta sport and recreation community. They're very concerned that to this point the government has not implemented – and they're worried may not implement at all – the Alberta sport plan recommendations. They've been waiting patiently now for a few years. They really do, it would be my submission, deserve an answer to this question.

We continue to hear from members opposite how health care costs are unmanageable in this province, and if that were true and they really wanted to put their money where their mouth is, what better way than to do even more? I'm not going to suggest that the Health and Wellness minister is doing nothing to promote health and wellness. In fact, she participated in a five-kilometre walk yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that supported the Kids Help Phone. So, certainly, I think we have an example of a minister who is walking the talk, but as a government I would submit that there's a lot more that they could be doing in terms of supporting health and wellness in the area of sport and recreation.

Now, the last thing, Mr. Speaker, is that the minister prior to the current minister had assured Albertans that the Alberta sport plan was in fact on its way. As I say, Albertans in general and particularly those involved in the sport and recreation community are still waiting for a more concrete answer. They are wondering, in fact, when they will see action on this issue.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the answer from the minister on Written Question 16.

**The Speaker:** Maybe we should hear what the government wants to do with the question first. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

**Mr. Stevens:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Community Development I'd like to speak to Written Question 16. It asks what measures the Ministry of Community Development has taken to meet the funding challenges associated with supporting provincial sports and recreation programs as detailed by the Alberta Sport Plan Task Force report. It asks for information for each of the years 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005. I will say now that this government has worked hard to make sport and recreation funding a priority. We're aware of its social, health, and economic benefits and do as much as we can to support Albertans who want to be active and involved in sports as well as the associations that provide programs in all of our communities.

So why the sport plan? It's as a result of three factors. The federal government developed a Canadian sport policy. It was felt that a provincial policy should complement it. Alberta's last sport plan was developed in the 1980s. It was time to renew it, and the sport community was looking for a vision of where sport was going in the future and requested that a revised plan be developed. These factors led to the creation of the nine-member Alberta Sport Plan Task Force supported by an advisory committee in 2000. The task

force drafted a document that identified new strategies for sport development in the province. Their document, *A New Century for Amateur Sport: From Participation to Excellence*, is commonly referred to as the Alberta sport plan.

4:30

We're recognized in Alberta as world leaders in many different ways. The Minister of Community Development wants Alberta to be recognized as a world leader in sport and recreation. He wants Alberta to be the healthiest and most active population. The Alberta sport plan is one piece to the puzzle that will allow all of this to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to accept Written Question 16, which will detail what action the Ministry of Community Development has taken since 2001-2002 to address the needs of Alberta's sport and recreation community.

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

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was prepared to argue vigorously to have the government accept this, and I'm very pleased to hear that they have because we do seem to have a dilemma around our support and funding for amateur sports in this province. As the previous critic for Community Development and the current critic for Health and Wellness, in which I see these things all start to come together, I'm recognizing that the government needs to take a substantial role here.

When we look at the report – and it appears in the Legislature Library here; anyone can get a copy because I just did – it has a detailed sports plan which includes things like the benefits of sport, linking the current experience with identified areas of emphasis, and then goes through those areas of emphasis for things like participation, excellence, leadership and volunteer development, sport marketing and communications, business, facilities, funding, ethics in sport, safe environment, research and development, et cetera, and then again gives a number of actions that they are suggesting.

Part of our frustration here is that although the government keeps saying that it wants Albertans to be more active and there has been a mandated but, again, unsupported direction for educational institutions to be providing 30 hours of physical activity a month, we're not seeing that support permeate through the rest of our society, so anyone not a child, for example.

It's of continual frustration to me to hear the Minister of Health and Wellness talk about considering tax exemptions or tax receipts to individuals who might buy a membership from a commercial gym and that this would somehow be tax receiptable. There are actions that she could be taking that would be of benefit to the many, many organizations that operate at the grassroots, things like extending the same tax status for property tax exemptions from the educational property tax as is currently extended to multicultural groups and artistic groups, for example. That exemption has not been extended to sports groups, so there is an easy way to help them get more accessible to people and to help more people. If they were able to access that particular status, that reduces some of their costs, and they in turn will offer their services to the public for less money, making them more accessible.

A second way – and the Minister of Gaming could address this, probably. I believe there is still a prohibition on amateur adult sports and recreation groups from accessing casino income or the opportunity to get a casino licence and operate a casino and, I think, also for adult sports and recreation groups to access bingos. So, again, another way of them being able to offset their costs which is not currently available to them.

I know that the ministry is very interested, and I hope they're interested in what's being put forward here, but I am frustrated by the long-term lack of action in this area. I've been watching it since 1997. We're nine and a half years down the road now, and I have not seen a substantial difference.

I'm glad that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie brought this forward. I'm very pleased to see the government accept it, and I look forward to seeing what those concrete actions are that the government is taking.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to see that this was in fact accepted. I just wanted to make a brief comment in regard to how we might be able to look at the integration of the Ministry of Community Development pursuant to specific provincial sports and recreational programs that are encouraged by the provincial government through the Alberta Sport Plan Task Force and look for a means by which we can encourage healthy activity and realize the benefits of healthy activity through other ministries.

In fact, this should be and would be good news that would come from this question. If it's not, then I would suggest that that's exactly what we should be looking for in regard to the increase in physical activity of Albertans and then all Canadians and the savings, in fact, that we will achieve as a result through our health care system through reduced health concerns later in life and, as well, through proper socialization of our young people so that they might enjoy a healthier mental state and be less prone to psychological or psychiatric problems in the future as well. My understanding is, in fact, that a 10 per cent increase federally across the country was estimated to save at least \$5 billion in health costs back in, probably, about eight years ago. This just gives us a small indication of the benefits that could be derived from a serious commitment to community development, specifically to focus on provincial sports and recreational programs.

It's no mistake, Mr. Speaker, that in certain countries or jurisdictions that have made a serious commitment to their sports programs, not only do you see an increase in health overall of the population, but you also see a greater success rate in the competitive level of sports. When I look to, say, Australia, as an example, where the Australians have put in a very serious commitment to all levels of both competitive and noncompetitive sporting, you see the overall health of this country, perhaps save for skin cancer, increasing tremendously as well as their medal total in various Olympic Games increasing considerably. So you see an overall direct correspondence between the amount of money being invested in sports and the health of your population.

There are economic benefits to be had as well, certainly, by having an increased focus on sport. We have, perhaps, an extension of facilities, outdoor and indoor, that can be developed in this province, which attracts tourism. It attracts spending as well. The more we get people out and interacting with each other, I would suggest that we create a stronger social fabric as well, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, the government has already accepted this question.



**Mr. Mason:** Yes, I appreciate that.

**The Speaker:** Okay. Well, good enthusiasm.

**Mr. Mason:** I'm well aware of that, and I want to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to the government for doing this. They aren't all bad, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes they do do the right thing and surprise us, and I must say I'm surprised. But there are a number of things about this that I think are very important.

The written question had the effect of getting me to take a look at the report that's referenced in the question. The Ministry of Community Development has established an Alberta Sport Plan Task Force, and they produced the report *A New Century for Amateur Sport: From Participation to Excellence*. It's very interesting.

Mr. Speaker, when the government does respond to this, there are a number of areas that I would hope they would deal with. First of all is the strong relationship that exists between physical activity and individual health. This is from the report. The report cites the Mills report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, *Sport in Canada: Everybody's Business*, from 1998. It says that a 10 per cent increase in the physical activity level of Canadians would save an estimated \$5 billion in health care costs.

**4:40**

Now, I know that the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Premier have repeatedly talked about the sustainability of our health care arrangements in this province and the ability to continue to pay increasing costs, and here we have a report that says that a 10 per cent increase in physical activity would save \$5 billion in health care costs. Mr. Speaker, we can only speculate about what Alberta's share of that \$5 billion in savings would be, but we know that it would be very substantial, in the order of hundreds of millions of dollars. This would completely undercut the argument for an increasing the level of privatization in our health care system.

It talks a little bit about the importance of physical activity in deterring smoking. People who are physically active are less likely to engage in smoking. People benefit in many, many ways, so I would hope that the government would deal with some of these things.

The Mazankowski report, which we are very, very critical of, as members may realize, has also some good things in it, including the reform of staying healthy. The Mazankowski report proposes to contribute to the health of Albertans by providing a strong commitment to education, setting clear health objectives and targets, providing better information to Albertans, and taking steps to encourage Albertans to stay healthy.

One of the suggested actions of the Alberta Future Summit under the direction of Health and Wellness was to market and promote the benefits of recreation and wellness. I'd like to know in the government's answer specifically what they've chosen to do about that – the reports go back to 2001-2002 – to reintroduce the daily physical or recreational activities in the school curriculum. Maybe the hon. Minister of Education can assist in that.

Active living strategies. This is one that I'm very interested in, Mr. Speaker, and would very much like to hear back from the government on. It says, "maintain and upgrade aging recreational infrastructure." We know that the government has provided additional funding of a billion dollars in the capital region, in Calgary, and for the rest of the province, and I would like to know how much of that is going to be allocated by municipalities to maintaining and upgrading the aging recreational infrastructure.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that I have in my own constituency and in the ward that I represented at one time on Edmonton city council a

number of recreational facilities, some of which are rather outdated and old and are not being properly maintained. They desperately need additional resources, and I'd be very curious about how that is going to affect my constituents but also around the province.

I certainly want to encourage the government to deal with some of those issues. It's important as we begin to refund the infrastructure that has been left unattended for a number of years while the government pursued its financial goals of eliminating the debt and the deficit, thereby transferring some of the cost into our infrastructure. It's a bit like not changing the oil in your car because you're trying to pay off a loan, and you may in fact have higher costs down the road as a result. So how that has affected the issue is something that we need to take a look at.

Mr. Speaker, finally, there are significant economic benefits that are associated with hosting sporting events. Edmonton has traditionally been an excellent host system whether it's for the Universiade or for the Commonwealth Games. I was able to attend a number of events related to both of those. Those are certainly important and valuable things, and I hope that the government is willing and able to provide enough information on these areas, Mr. Speaker, when they do bring forward their report.

Once again, I'd like to commend the government for actually saying that they are going to answer this question. It's a delightful surprise as far as I'm concerned, and I hope that the government will continue in this vein for many years to come or until the next election, whichever comes first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** So I take it that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona wants to participate too.

**Dr. Pannu:** Very much so, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Proceed.

**Dr. Pannu:** I do appreciate the opportunity. While I'm delighted that the government has certainly indicated its willingness to address this question seriously and, I hope, soon, I do want to however speak here as someone who is a senior. Often, to justify the introduction of the third way, to privatize, and to attain sustainability, the Premier or the minister of health and other members on the government side of the House have been trying to scare Albertans into believing that since the number of seniors in our population is going to grow dramatically, it will be impossible for us to support the seniors because they'll be the major users of our health care system. Now I've been . . .

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, please. Before someone rises on a point of relevance, I would like to point out to the hon. member that we're dealing with Written Question 16, which has to do with sport and the Alberta sport plan, so if you can tie this in to seniors and everything else, this would be really helpful.

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate your direction. Every time you advise me, I very seriously follow that. I was coming to the very point that you were making.

What I'm saying is that the availability of recreational facilities, encouragement to seniors to take part in sports, to remain healthy, to remain active: these things are very closely connected. The health care expenditures go up if we get sick more often, and as we become senior – and I've been in that position now, Mr. Speaker, for about eight years, I'm afraid, so I know that from year to year the challenges to remain healthy grow. I do take part in recreational sports,

from biking to walking to swimming occasionally, and take part in some other sports. The key to making sure that our health care expenditures remain sustainable is going to be increasingly the ability of seniors to remain healthy for the longest possible time in their senior years.

What better way to both limit expenditures on our health and to increase the quality of health for the very people who have built this province through their sweat and toil over the last century that we've been celebrating? We've been celebrating the achievements of this province thanks to the work the people who are now in their senior years do.

I take this opportunity to participate in this debate on this question because I know that the government needs to be reminded that there's a great opportunity in investing in recreational facilities and in supports, facilities that will be available to all Albertans but, in particular, focusing on both encouraging seniors, whose numbers are growing in our population, to engage in these activities and to provide communities the facilities and the infrastructure that will make available these facilities closer to where seniors live.

I want to close, Mr. Speaker, by saying that my wife and I had the opportunity to fly to Singapore a few years ago. In the morning we were on a bus going back to the airport, and on the way what was quite amazing to see was how many inhabitants of the city were out early in the morning, about 6 o'clock, in group sports activities, exercising, most of them seniors. No wonder.

There are ways within the public health care system to control costs as well as to guarantee to our seniors a far better quality of life than we presently do. So answers to this question, that I'm sure the minister will very kindly provide, do raise additional questions, in fact many questions, that we need to pay attention to and take every opportunity to find ways in which we can control costs for health care on one hand but at the same time also improve the quality of life of seniors, who will make up, I think, in the next 20 years about 25 per cent of our population. I also hear about the pension crises that are going to arise because fewer people are going to be working and paying taxes. How do you control all these things unless you in a very positive way, in a very active way, create facilities and opportunities for people to remain healthy so that unnecessary expenditures with respect to health and other problems that arise as we move into senior years are avoided and problems prevented?

4:50

So, Mr. Speaker, I again want to thank the government for its readiness to accept this written question, but there are many implications of raising this issue here, and I recommend to the government to look closely at how it can create these facilities for seniors so they remain healthy and don't in fact become a burden on our health care system and are not seen to be a burden on the health care system but, rather, remain active, productive citizens.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview hasn't participated yet on this?

**Mr. Martin:** No.

**The Speaker:** Well, please proceed.

**Mr. Martin:** Well, I'd feel out of it if I didn't contribute, Mr. Speaker. I'll look at the other end: being much younger. I'll talk about my experience as a school trustee dealing with a very important issue, and that is child obesity. If we want to talk about seniors providing a lot of problems to the health care system, if we

don't get kids active, we have a very serious problem. We know that. There have been many articles written about what's happening.

I know that the government tried to react. I guess that I'd like to see some more co-operation with the Ministry of Community Development and the Department of Education because if we're going to change things, I think it has got to be done at that level. It's important that we deal with the provincial sports and recreational programs, but it's also just as important to get kids participating at the elementary school level and even earlier and all the way through their school, Mr. Speaker. I think we see the rates going up for child obesity to 17 per cent in some cases.

When I was a trustee, I brought in a motion about this very thing, that we begin to take a look at it. It has to do with a lot of different problems, Mr. Speaker. It has to deal with the food that kids are eating. In some cases to have money for schools, we had vending machines that were pop and all the wrong food. I think we're finally moving in that direction. We have a problem, I suppose, with the modern technology of computers and video games and the rest of it. We have a lot of reasons why people are not participating.

What was scary to me is that they said that some of the kids in elementary school were developing middle-age diseases already at that level. Hypertension, high cholesterol: these things were occurring at that level with a lot of kids. Imagine the misery for them and their families if they die young, but imagine the cost to the health care system down the way if we don't begin to deal with these problems.

It's almost a new experience when they accept a question or a motion for a return, and we always celebrate when they do, Mr. Speaker. I guess that in doing this, they are putting money in and looking at funding challenges, supporting provincial sports and recreational programs. That's one of the things that I would wonder about with both ministers. The move towards more physical education in the schools has created some curriculum problems, but I think it's a necessity. We have to start early there. I'm wondering if some of that money from Community Development could also be worked together within the schools, Mr. Speaker, because one department does this, another department does that, another department does this. A lot of the programs that we saw – nutrition: we had nurses in the schools in the city centre project; that made sense. That was from the department of health. The Department of Children's Services had people working in the city centre project.

The more that we could work together in departments and begin at the very early levels in our schools, the better our population will be and the healthier our population will be. We have to recognize that some people are calling it a crisis. If we don't begin to deal with this, we're going to have some kids – as I say, the phys ed move is a good one, Mr. Speaker, but to think that it's enough just to have good sports teams: it's not. We have to do a much better job at that level.

I guess that, in retrospect, I'd be asking the Minister of Education if there is some co-operation with the Ministry of Community Development in terms of these sorts of programs so that they could be helpful in some of their budgets in dealing at the school level with what is a serious problem. I think the minister would agree.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's nice that the government has accepted this. We'll look forward to their answers. Again, I stress that we'd be looking for that co-operation at the lower level. We'll have the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona worry about the seniors, and I'll worry about the group that's closer to my age group.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close the debate.

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been whispered around the House this afternoon that there may be a filibuster taking place. I have a confession to make. I, actually, had been asked to use my entire five minutes in closing so that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar might be able to collect his thoughts in preparation for written questions 17, 18, and 19; however, given the number of speakers on Written Question 16, I see that he is, in fact, ready. So I'm not going to take any time to close the debate. I will not participate in the filibuster. Rather, I would like to thank the government for agreeing in the affirmative to Written Question 16 and look forward to the following questions.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Well, the only matter now to be resolved is whether or not the House will give approval for the answer to be given under Written Question 16.

[Written Question 16 carried]

### Royalty Review Consultations

Q17. Mr. MacDonald moved that the following question be accepted.

What groups or individuals did the Ministry of Energy consult with in its latest royalty review?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the debate this afternoon on Written Question 17. Now, I would at this point remind all hon. members that this is a very important written question because without resource revenue or royalty revenue there would be very little money to provide any sort of financial support for Alberta sport – not only Alberta sport, but seniors, for health, for education, for various government initiatives. So when we talk about royalty reviews and the royalty rates, we have to give this matter a great deal of discussion.

I'm very pleased to learn that the Minister of Energy has conducted a royalty review. Now, this is only the latest royalty review. There hasn't been any significant change in the amount of the royalties or the percentage of royalties collected going back to 1992. I'm very pleased to see that the government has initiated this royalty review, but who, exactly, was consulted? We know the structure of the royalty formula. It certainly affects everybody in the oil patch. We've got different royalties for new gas, for old gas, for third-tier oil, for new oil, old oil. In fact, we also have many royalty holidays, Mr. Speaker, through royalty reduction programs.

5:00

I'm looking at the Minister of Energy's annual report. This is going back a couple of years, but at that time there were five oil and four gas royalty reduction programs. Now, I think it's even gone up since then, and there is an additional royalty program. "These programs reduce Crown royalties to encourage industry to produce from wells which otherwise would not be economically productive." Certainly with 70-plus dollar oil – we have also natural gas prices in excess of \$6 American per gigajoule – there are market prices that will encourage operators to keep each and every well in production. For those that are not in production, certainly those high market prices are a significant incentive to squeeze every barrel of oil out of the formation and recover every gigajoule or cubic metre of natural gas that we can.

Now, I was as surprised as anyone to recognize and learn – I was astonished to learn that the actual amount when we look at the total

royalty production as a percentage is going down. Our revenue share, the Crown's revenue share, was 23 per cent in 1996. It fluctuates. In 1999 it was 21 per cent. In 2001 it was 24 per cent. In 2003 it was also 24 per cent. This information is provided by Ross Smith Energy.

Mr. Speaker, was Ross Smith Energy included in this latest royalty review? Now we find out for the year that we are discussing in budget estimates that this government is collecting 19 per cent of the total revenue share. It's gone down. The market prices have gone up, but the actual percentage that this government is collecting is less, significantly less.

If Ross Smith Energy was not consulted in this royalty review, then who was? Certainly, the natural resources of this province belong to all Albertans. They have a right to know who is responsible for ensuring that Albertans are getting their fair share of the royalties. I know that the government receives advice from many, many different individuals or forecasters. We only have to look at the economic outlook from this year's fiscal plan and we see that the Alberta Department of Energy also surveys on a confidential basis, and I hope that if this written question is rejected, this is not why, Mr. Speaker, because this information is received on a confidential basis. The government through the Department of Energy receives surveys and private forecasts from the following forecasters: PIRA; another outfit called PEL; Petral; Purvin & Gertz; Groppe Long & Littel; CGES; and Wood MacKenzie. These are some of the groups.

I was surprised to learn now that the government has made a significant change in the forecasts of natural gas prices. It would be interesting to know if this was a result of this latest royalty review because I read – and this is again in the fiscal plan – in footnote (a):

The natural gas price is the US price of natural gas at Henry Hub Louisiana, as this is the benchmark for natural gas prices in the rest of North America. Since many consultants do not forecast the Alberta Reference Price, which is used in the Alberta Budget and is the basis for Alberta natural gas royalty calculations, the table has been changed this year to the US Henry Hub price of natural gas. The Alberta Government forecast in the table above is also the US Henry Hub price.

If we're going to have forecasts with the Henry hub price, was this as a result of the latest royalty review, the consultations that have gone on? There are some people who point out that the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' information is the basis of our royalties. What say did they have in this royalty review? What say did the smaller producers have in this? They would perhaps be the ones that would be affected the most by any changes that we would make.

We have to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that when we conduct a royalty review, we consult everyone. We also should consult the citizens that own 81 per cent of the resource. That's the Crown's share of land where we can get royalties from. We also get royalties from freehold. The citizens who own this resource should be consulted. They should be consulted to see if we want to put more money in the heritage savings trust fund, if we want to put more money into public education, into public health care, what exactly we want to do with this money. Many people are concerned about the royalties that the province is currently collecting and would be very interested in this review.

Now, I'm very disappointed to tell the House that this government is very secretive when the issue of royalties comes up. An accountable government, an open and transparent government would share the information with the owners of the resources. I thought during budget debates earlier that I was going to receive a great deal of information on the royalty structure from the Department of Energy. But every day, Mr. Speaker, I go to my Legislative Assembly mailbox. I'm waiting there. I get mail on a lot of issues, but

unfortunately I'm getting nothing to date from the minister on that royalty review.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Now, just to be sure. The chair has paid very close attention to the remarks of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but did he actually move the question? The chair will assume that he did, but careful reading may be required.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not certain if there was a movement of the question either.

That said, the question. We had one similar to it in question 5. There's an assumption that there is a date of a start and stop of the latest royalty review. I mentioned it then, mentioned it's ongoing. Our department is continually looking at information from around the world. There isn't a "latest royalty review." I'm not certain even how to reference or what to provide given that it's not an event. We're continually looking at our programs, continually looking at information that comes at us, be it from people here or around the world. On that basis – I'm not certain how to confine it – we don't accept this written question.

We did say, though, that we do at times get reports, analyses done from around other places that comment on our royalty structures, and we will make copies. As I said in our debate on our estimates, we will make copies of some of those royalty assessment documents available to all members. We're going through some of that right now, and those documents will be provided in due course.

5:10

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wonder if I could clarify: did the minister actually accept the question?

**The Speaker:** It was rejected.

**Mr. Mason:** It was rejected. Okay. Well, that's better, Mr. Speaker. The universe is now sort of more the way I'm used to it.

**The Speaker:** Normal.

**Mr. Mason:** Yeah, normal. I feel better oriented now, Mr. Speaker, to my appropriate role, and I thank the minister for that.

But I'm very disappointed in the government, Mr. Speaker, very disappointed that this government would reject a question which I think is clear. It's clear that the minister has pulled out in this "latest . . . review" as a reason to reject the question when, in fact, whether that's in the question or not, it's a very relevant question. I would really like to know what groups the government does consult with when it sets these appallingly low royalty rates for the people of Alberta's own natural gas and our own petroleum resources.

The royalty rates in this province were set years ago for \$15 a barrel of oil. What's the price of oil today, Mr. Speaker? It's well over \$50. It goes up to almost \$70. I don't think we're going to see the other side of \$50 a barrel for quite some time. The people of Alberta are receiving a pittance of their resources.

Other jurisdictions in world that have oil – and I'm not talking about countries that are very, very different in many ways from Canada, but I'm talking about countries that are developed countries, that have a high standard of living, that have high levels of educa-

tion, investment in social structures, in social programs, health care systems, and so on. If you look at similar types of countries, not necessarily similar types of oil industries but similar types of countries – I'll give just two examples. One is Alaska, which is, as the Premier would say, not a country; it's a state. Also Norway. You compare the royalty rates that they receive on their oil and gas. It's much higher. It's much higher, and the result is that there is more money that has been set aside for the people of Alaska and the people of Norway that they can invest in their people. The fact that we have very high surpluses, Mr. Speaker, should not blind us to the fact that the increases in prices for oil and natural gas have flowed primarily to the companies that extract them and not to the people of this province.

So I think that it's high time that we reviewed the royalty structure for our nonrenewable natural resources. Mr. Speaker, I think we need to really reassess how we view these resources. They are not a source of extra revenue so that we can bring our taxes way down. They belong to not just this generation of Albertans, but they belong to every future generation as well, not just our grandchildren but beyond our grandchildren. So we must deal with them, in my view, in a way that the vast majority of the value of those resources is retained in this province and retained for the benefit of the generations to come in this province.

The government is not doing that. They're taking far less than they could or should from these nonrenewable resources as they are being extracted, and even of that they're spending perhaps far more than they need to or than they should or than would otherwise be seen as prudent. So I think that's a very important factor.

Royalties. I want to maybe talk a little bit about the scale. Royalties from synthetic crude have reached a record of \$1.2 billion, Mr. Speaker, and the total nonrenewable resource revenue is expected to hit over \$11 billion in the year 2006-07 according to our 2006 budget. Now, these are staggering, staggering amounts, but it really speaks to the fact that the majority of the value of these resources is slipping through our fingers. So when the government consults with, how they consult with them, when that occurs, and what the consultation is, in my view, is of tremendous public interest. It's of interest far beyond this Assembly. It's of interest to every citizen, and it will be of interest to future generations as they look back on the decisions we make today. So for the minister to reject the question because he quibbles with the line "latest royalty review" in here is just not good enough.

What groups or individuals is the Ministry of Energy consulting with on an ongoing basis? If this is an ongoing thing and not periodic reviews, that's fine, but the minister has neatly avoided answering the question, which is of fundamental importance. The government claims to be one of the most open governments in the world, in the universe if you listen to some ministers during question period, but the fact of the matter is that it is one of the most opaque. They're not transparent. They're not even translucent. They are opaque. You know, we've seen some legislation that's being considered by this House right now that will make them even more opaque. Trying to find out what's going on, how decisions are made which affect billions of dollars of revenue that belongs to the people of this province is of very, very fundamental importance, and for the minister to reject this question is just insulting the people of this province and their children and their grandchildren, who care about the future of this province. These issues are of fundamental importance.

I'd love to know who they're talking to, Mr. Speaker, and I'd love to be able to compare that list of companies that may be on that list with the people who benefit from low royalty rates in this province. I'd even like to compare it to the contribution list for the Conserva-

tive Party in the last couple of elections. There may be a correlation. I don't know, and we won't know unless the government is prepared to bring this forward and answer the questions.

So I hope that in some of the subsequent questions that come up today or next Monday the government will be more forthcoming and more transparent. It would be nice to see just a little bit of light coming through the government instead of just a solid, opaque lens, that the government prefers.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I will yield my place and see if there are other speakers. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to rise and respond to the minister's rejection of Written Question 17, which I thought was an excellent question. All they had to do was replace the word "latest" with "ongoing," according to his own words.

The point that I would like to bring up is the fact that this is something that's very much in discussion with Albertans across the province. They don't understand it, and although the minister might be very well versed and perhaps the government is very well versed in why our royalty rates are where they are, Albertans that talk to me aren't. There's very much discussion out there that we're being ripped off, and I go around and I explain to many of my constituents that a lot of our wells in Alberta are not like the ones in Norway. They're not like the ones in Alaska. They don't produce a hundred thousand barrels a day, and the cost of drilling those is being offset with a low royalty so that it is economical for them to go forward. But I think that there wouldn't be a better opportunity than to accept a question like this to explain to Albertans why our royalty rates are where they are and to have a good briefing from this government that the people of Alberta could understand and see those things.

5:20

The other point that the hon. members have brought up is the fact that oil is not \$15 a barrel. It's not \$50 a barrel. It's \$70 a barrel. Perhaps we need to look at a new way, with inflation and the way the world is going, to accommodate royalties when we see such an escalation.

I use the example of wind farms. Currently a wind farm might need to generate a hundred thousands dollars' worth of electricity a year at 7 cents a kilowatt, but if the price of electricity was to go to 14 cents in a few more years, then in fact that would be producing \$200,000 worth of royalties for the electric company. The land-owner might double from 3 per cent at \$3,000 to \$6,000 a year. The companies are earning, then, at that point \$180,000 or \$188,000 in a year, and they could easily be doubling the rates. It could very much be on a stepped or an escalating program as the prices rise.

So I'm disappointed that the minister didn't accept this question, and I hope that they'll reconsider it and just publish something for people to realize what the ongoing royalty reviews are, who they're talking with and explain what we do here in Alberta in a plain and simple brochure or on the Alberta Energy website so that all Albertans can see that it's crystal clear and understandable, so that we can compare apples to apples, not comparing a five barrel a day well to a 100,000 barrel a day well in Alaska and saying that we're being ripped off, because people don't understand those things.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise with some unhappiness as to why the minister is choosing to not answer this

question. I know for a fact that it's been mentioned before that the Ministry of Energy is in fact undergoing a review on royalty rates, and my understanding is that we were expecting to hear some information in that regard perhaps as early as July. So we know and he knows what we're talking about here in regard to this ongoing royalty review.

What we need at this juncture, Mr. Speaker, is some degree of transparency in regard to this review because it involves information that is very relevant to each and every Albertan in this province. We are talking about setting a rate for oil and gas. In fact, I would venture to say that we should be setting a rate for other sources of energy, even coal, which is otherwise owned by each of us. So the price that we're putting on these products is a direct correspondence to the amount that each Albertan would be getting under ideal circumstances.

By choosing to have this review process under some degree of secrecy or at least some lack of transparency makes it immediately suspicious to all of us as to what sort of deal is being cut behind our backs for something that we otherwise all own together. We know that our royalty rates are out of step with almost any other measure of royalty rates across North America, this hemisphere, and around the world. I would venture to say, Mr. Speaker, that at least part of the sort of mad rush that we have to exploit our energy resources is at least in part due to the fact that we're charging such a cheap price for our royalty rates that it's like some kind of fire sale. Energy companies know that the rates have to go up, so let's try to get as much as we can before they start charging a price that is actually in keeping with world rates. So we're creating a problem in regard to an uncontrolled economy just because we are being somehow stubborn in setting a rate that's more in keeping with the world price of oil and gas.

You know, we can use any yardstick that we might want to determine, to suggest, or to confirm that, in fact, the price is a fire-sale price at this juncture. By no means am I suggesting that we don't expect energy companies to make a fair profit for their endeavours. It's very central to our economy that energy companies are doing well, and we encourage them to do so. However, to suggest that we do not take adequate funds from those activities – and it's not a tax, but rather it is a price based on the portion of the product that we otherwise all own together as Albertans. So to not set a decent price does all of us a disservice. The process of setting that price has to be something that is in the public realm.

I know from a number of different sources that different energy companies are expecting that price to go up, but every day that we delay on setting a royalty price which is in keeping with world standards, we lose considerably, Mr. Speaker. That's why I've brought forward on a number of occasions a windfall royalty regime based on progressive measures looking at: as the price goes up, then so, too, in a very modest and reasonable way does the royalty rate go up, a windfall royalty rate increase. This is something that would be able to accommodate for the vagaries of prices in the world energy markets, which we know are very volatile, but also would be able to then account for these windfall rates where we can take a small portion of it and put it back into our economy.

We're increasingly, unfortunately, more and more reliant on those nonrenewable resource revenues to run this province. That's a different topic, and I will stay otherwise on topic, but the fact is that we are reducing our other taxation rates to the point where we really are dependent upon these nonrenewable resource rates. As that revenue passes out the window, Mr. Speaker – I would suggest that we let it fly out the window every day that we're not charging a proper royalty rate – that's money that we're not ever going to get back to run this province the way that it should be run in an equal

and reasonable way, ensuring social services for all people, ensuring that we maintain a certain level of infrastructure. It's an equation of diminishing returns, so that's why we want to see this information in the most prescient way possible. Who's setting those levels, and when and where are they going in terms of royalty rates? It's absolutely essential for all of us, and I would expect nothing less.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will not be long, but I do want to echo the comments of the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, who indicated that there is a great deal of confusion amongst the people of this province when it comes to royalty rates and how they're collected and the lack or at least the perceived lack of openness and accountability from the government. So very much so am I disappointed in the minister's response this afternoon.

**Ms Blakeman:** What about the lack of transparency?

**Mr. R. Miller:** My colleague from Edmonton-Centre suggests a lack of transparency, and I guess that's what I was really suggesting.

Mr. Speaker, everywhere I go in this province, I'm constantly met by people asking the question as to whether or not we are in fact getting a fair return on our natural resources. The question really is: how do we know? In what I would consider to be a fair and reasonable attempt by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to find out whether or not we are getting that fair and reasonable return on our resources, we have another effort by the government to withhold information or shield information from the public of this province and thereby not allow us to in fact find out whether or not the regime that we're currently operating under is returning the revenue to this province that we would deserve for it, and in the case of this latest review, which is really what this question is about, who did we talk to and how were the decisions reached in terms of the most recent review of those royalty rates?

**The Speaker:** Excuse me, hon. member and members, the House stands adjourned until 8 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]