

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title:** Tuesday, May 9, 2006

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 06/05/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

### Prayers

**The Speaker:** Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head:

### Introduction of Visitors

**Mr. Coutts:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports it is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a very special guest who has joined us today in the Assembly. Although originally from Manitoba, Mr. Mike Kaluzniak has spent his adult life in Alberta, but he has never had the opportunity to visit the Legislature until today. What makes this particular visit so special is that Mr. Kaluzniak is 100 years of age. Now, given that we are currently celebrating the 100th anniversary of our Assembly's first sitting, I think that his timing is outstanding.

He's still an active member of our community. He told the staff of the St. Michael's Millennium Pavilion, where he currently lives, that he wanted to visit us here at the Legislature so that he could finally see how things work in the provincial government, so he's watching us closely. I'm pleased that he's going to get that opportunity today, and I'd like to introduce him and his guests. Along with Mr. Kaluzniak are his sons Marvin and John Kaluzniak; Stan Fisher, president and CEO of the St. Michael's Health Group; Christine Peterenko, director of the St. Michael's Health Group; and Irene Miskiw, manager of the Millennium Pavilion. Mr. Speaker, they are all seated in your gallery, and I ask them to please rise so they can receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

### Introduction of Guests

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the hardworking members of the Northern Alberta Development Council who are meeting in Edmonton today. Joining us in the Speaker's gallery are Carmen Ewing, of Girouxville; Helen Henderson, of High Prairie; Mike Mihaly, of High Level; Michael Ouellette, of Grande Prairie; Williard Strebchuck, of Whitecourt; Maurice Rivard, of Bonnyville; and Harvey Yoder, of Lac La Biche. They are also accompanied by staff members from the Peace River office. Seated in the members' gallery are the executive director, Dan Dibbelt, Allen Geary, Kim Persaud, Jan Mazurik, Roxanne Heinen, and Jack Kramer. These individuals are to be commended for their dedication to the advancement of northern development through regional initiatives and partnerships with the private sector and community-based organizations. They are seated in both galleries this afternoon, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you 38 of

the very brightest young minds we have in Alberta, all of whom are attending Jackson Heights school in my constituency. They are accompanied today by teachers and group leaders Mrs. Celia Correlje, Mrs. Pam Schenk with parent helpers as well, Mrs. Marina Doyle and Mrs. Emily Sieusahai. I would ask that they now rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Marz:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hate to argue with the hon. Minister of Education, but everyone knows that the brightest young minds come from Trochu Valley high school. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly today 18 very enthusiastic students from Trochu Valley high. They've already had their picture taken, and they've had the opportunity to meet the Minister of Education. They're accompanied today by Mr. Bill Cunningham, teacher, and Mrs. Brenda Hoppins and Mrs. Diane Doerksen. They're all seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Dr. Taft:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We all here owe our success to any number of other people who have helped us out along the way. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two people who've helped me out. They happen to be two of my sisters, one of whom is visiting from Ottawa. They are seated in the public gallery, and their names are Sylvia Gazsi-Gill and Valerie Warke. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of all members.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** They are obviously much younger sisters.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

**Mr. Backs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured and pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the wonderful volunteers that are here today from the Northgate Lions seniors' centre, which is really the best seniors' centre in all of Canada, I'm sure. It's centred in Edmonton-Manning, of course, and it has facilities ranging from a new seniors' fitness centre just special to seniors, lapidary, woodworking, art, weaving, and many, many other fine, fine facilities. It's the volunteers that make it work. They're here with their guide today, Mr. Ian Mathieson. I welcome them, and I ask you all to welcome them to the Legislature.

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

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly my father, Bob Mason, and my stepmom, Kay Guthrie. My dad is a retired electrical engineer and small business owner. He was a founding member of the Reform Party of Canada, and he likes Preston Manning. But he likes me better, and he's now a member of the Alberta NDP. My stepmom, Kay, is retired after a long career with CKUA. She is a writer and very active in the arts community. Both are very active. They attend the Fringe and the Folk Festival every year, and they've travelled in the last few years in Africa, South America, and India. This year both of them celebrated their 80th birthdays, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that my dad and Kay now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and members of the Assembly Roy Skoreyko. Roy recently won the Norm McLeod award from the Alberta Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board for his work with them. Roy is very concerned about the lack of funding for disabled people in Alberta and the cutbacks in services that PDD boards are now facing. I would ask that Roy now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Airdrie-Chestermere.

**Ms Haley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to acknowledge three people from my constituency that are up in your gallery. They're with the Municipal District of Rocky View Council and are here to meet with a couple of ministers on some very important issues. As you know, Rocky View is one of the fastest growing areas in the whole province, and unfortunately the municipal district has to deal with all of the pressures from all the urban constituencies around it. I'd like to congratulate them on the work that they do and ask that they please rise. Lois is our deputy reeve, and she's accompanied by two other members of our council.

**The Speaker:** Are there others? The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Courtney Luimes. Courtney will be working in the Calgary-Glenmore constituency office this summer as part of the STEP program. Courtney has just completed her fourth year of a five-year, two-degree program at the University of Calgary. She's working towards a bachelor of commerce and a bachelor of arts degree, majoring in marketing and political science. She's also, in her free time, the president of the University of Calgary Campus Conservative Association. Courtney is here in the members' gallery, and I'd ask her to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of my greatest supporters, both in my professional life and in my personal life. I would like to introduce my mother-in-law, the best mother-in-law in the world, Clara Jonsson, and her husband, Bob Grant. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to stand and introduce two very capable new members of my staff to the Assembly. It's the first time that they've had a chance to be able to come to the Assembly and observe these proceedings. The first is Avery Trimble. She's been with us for a few months now and has joined us from our deputy minister's office. The second, Sheena McKinstrie, joined us just last week. I'd ask them if they'd both stand. Please join us to offer them the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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### Oral Question Period

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

#### Rod Love Consulting Inc.

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's former chief of staff Rod Love seems to make his living selling access to the Premier's office. FOIPed documents show that Love has moved freely from government contract to government contract, providing inside information through high-priced verbal advice. It's a money-making scheme at the taxpayers' expense. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that Rod Love is doing little more in these contracts than selling inside access to the Premier's office?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, to set the record straight – straight, absolutely straight – Rod Love hasn't had access to my office, and he doesn't use his consulting business to gain access to my office. He was my chief of staff, yes, absolutely. But his contracts with various government departments or health authorities are entirely up to the ministries or the health authority involved. It has absolutely nothing to do with my office. It has had nothing to do with my office.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: does the Premier recognize that Rod Love is peddling inside information obtained while serving as the Premier's chief of staff?

**Mr. Klein:** I have no idea what information he is providing to the various ministries or authorities, whether it's information he gained while in my office, which is very little, by the way – usually the opposition tells me what's going on – or whether he's providing other information. I have no idea, nor do I make it my business.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier assure this House that Rod Love is not sharing confidential government information with clients, such as PC leadership candidate Jim Dinning?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, I have no idea. I didn't even know that he was working for Jim Dinning. [interjection] I didn't. They can moan and groan all they want. Relative to the leadership campaign my policy is hands off, and I don't give a tinker's hoot who he works for.

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

#### Lobbyist Registry

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. High-paid contracts to people like Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois are merely symptoms of a much deeper problem. This government's sense of entitlement is so pervasive that it's no longer capable of even identifying a conflict of interest: the Premier is fielding job offers while in office; a Tory Party VP sits on the government's Internal Audit Committee; chairs of government committees use their positions to sell PC Party memberships; ex-MLAs get plum appointments. It goes on and on. To the Premier: why does the Premier insist that Albertans don't

have a right to know who's lobbying this government by his refusal to create a lobbyist registry?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, to set the record straight: again, I have no problems – I have no problems – with a lobbyist registry. I have said that for every upside there is a downside, and I want to make sure that when the Legislature considers a lobbyist registry, they consider the downside and they clearly identify those who are lobbyists and those who are not lobbyists. Now, I've raised the question: if a person who represents a school board or a university or a municipality is asking the government for money, are they lobbyists? I want to make sure that I know that the rules are clear.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that the Premier's former chief of staff Rod Love signed on to a juicy contract with the Calgary health region very shortly after leaving his position with the Premier's office, will the Premier commit to extending the legislative Conflicts of Interest Act to senior public officials?

**Mr. Klein:** I don't know if I have the power to do that. I understand that a report on conflict of interest guidelines by the all-party committee that examined this issue will be coming to the Legislature, and I suspect that it will be fully debated in these Chambers.

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

**Dr. Taft:** Thank you. Again to the Premier: given that the federal Conservatives are proposing a five-year cooling-off period for ministers, will the Premier commit to extending the mandatory cooling-off period to a minimum of one year for Alberta's cabinet ministers?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, I have told the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that I don't give a tinker's hoot whether it's 10 or 15 or 20 or 30 years. I'm leaving. I've said that all I want is to have time to do what I want to do and time to golf and fish. Big deal.

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

1:50

### Tuition Fee Policy

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After more than a decade of policy failure, during which one failed tuition policy gives way to another, each one off-loading more and more costs onto students and their families, the new Minister of Advanced Education and this government are trying now a different approach: make the changes from now on behind closed doors, cloaked in cabinet secrecy, rather than on the floor of the House. To the Premier: if the Premier is so confident that he can clean up the mess and deliver the most affordable, entrepreneurial, and innovative tuition policy in the nation, why won't he do it in full public view right here, in this House?

**Mr. Klein:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Advanced Education is responsible for bringing forward legislation. I understand that Bill 40, the Post-secondary Learning Amendment Act, will be before this legislative Chamber for debate, so I think it's premature for the hon. member to ask any questions. Plus, he can in an open, public, transparent fashion debate the issue.

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

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Advanced Education: is it true that his ministry has been telling student leaders that they either go along with this flawed Bill 40 or forget about getting a better tuition policy?

**Mr. Herard:** Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing I want to tell students is that the sky is not falling. I'm not aware of any such comments. I think that with your guidance I can speak to part of the act because it is on the Order Paper.

**The Speaker:** Well, hon. minister, please. We will have second reading of this particular bill coming up, so let's not debate the bill in question period. Deal with policy issues.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Taylor:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: will the minister commit to a joint meeting with me and student representatives before this flawed Bill 40 receives second reading? By the way, his predecessor says that he doesn't even need to bring in legislation in order to change tuition policy.

**Mr. Herard:** Mr. Speaker, there was so much noise that I could not hear the question. Could you repeat it?

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

### Rod Love Consulting Inc.

*(continued)*

**Mr. Mason:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The culture of entitlement surrounding this government is deeply entrenched. The Premier's former chief of staff Mr. Love has got himself another juicy contract with another government agency. The Calgary health authority is now paying Mr. Love \$350 an hour for heaven knows what. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. It's very simple. What exactly did the Calgary health authority get for their contract with Mr. Love at \$350 an hour?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, that's a question for the health authority. Today when I saw the report, it's very obvious that the health authority sets policy and has financial policies and implications and accountability examined by the Auditor General. So I would suggest that the hon. member approach the Calgary health authority and ask the question.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, is the minister suggesting that she does not have ministerial authority for what the Calgary health authority does? Is it not part of her responsibility as Minister of Health and Wellness? Yes or no?

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, the accountability of the government obviously is very clearly defined. Regional health authorities have the role and responsibility of engaging contracts as they see fit. They manage those contracts. They're accountable for those contracts both financially and from a substance perspective. We have very clearly delineated lines of authority in this regard.

**Mr. Mason:** Mr. Speaker, the minister can duck and weave, but she can't avoid the fact that Mr. Love is getting money for nothing and his perks for free. Now, will the minister please tell this House what exactly Rod Love did for the money he got from her agency.

**Ms Evans:** Mr. Speaker, I am quite convinced that if the Calgary health authority has a contract with a provider of service, like I-3, Mr. Love's consulting contract, or any other contract, they are getting value for money. They are intelligent people. They make decisions. They will no doubt be able to answer that question. The first notice I have of it is the newspaper report today, that these things have been revealed, and no doubt the Calgary health authority will share what they wish or can to both the member opposite and, certainly, subsequently to the Auditor General and to the ministry if it's appropriate.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

#### Royal Alberta Museum Acquisition

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the Royal Alberta Museum purchased a number of aboriginal items up for auction. The American Indian Movement has previously expressed concerns about the potential sale of these items and would like them reappropriated. My first question is to the Minister of Community Development. Could he please explain why the museum chose to purchase these items and what they will mean to Albertans and our aboriginal communities?

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

**Mr. Ducharme:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Royal Alberta Museum was able to acquire 29 of the 39 historic First Nations and Métis cultural artifacts that were put up for auction. These artifacts, collected by the ninth Earl of Southesk, have exceptional historical significance. These are items from the Canadian Plains from the mid-1800s, and more than a third of these objects are of Alberta origin. The collection was auctioned off piece by piece, which put it at risk of being sold to individual collectors, never to be seen again by the public.

I had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to sit in at the telephone auction, and I can assure you that the bidding was fast and furious. The purchase is an incredible opportunity to preserve some very important parts of our history for generations of Albertans to study, admire, and enjoy. Museum staff were very knowledgeable of each item's history, and visitors to our museums will now be able to see historic items that originated here over 145 years ago.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is also to the Minister of Community Development. How was the museum able to make this purchase?

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

**Mr. Ducharme:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The museum worked with a number of partners to secure funding. The government of Alberta committed \$500,000 through the museum, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and the federal government generously dedicated \$600,000 toward the sale.

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

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. How has the Alberta aboriginal community responded to the museum's purchase of these items?

**Ms Calahasen:** Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, most of the aboriginal community are ecstatic about this purchase because securing these items is connecting them to their past.

I commend the museum staff for all the hard work that they did in making sure that they secured First Nations and Métis support. As a matter of fact, they received letters of support from people such as Charles Weaselhead, who is the chief of the Kainai nation, from retired Senator Thelma Chalifoux, the File Hills Qu'Appelle First Nations Tribal Council, Prince Albert Tribal Council, and of course Treaty 7 Management Corporation. A lot of people across Canada from the aboriginal community were very interested in this collection.

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

#### Contaminated Sites Cleanup

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta may have paid off its financial debt, but it is taking on a huge environmental debt in hundreds of contaminated sites. Albertans should be outraged. Instead of following the law requiring "maximum protection to human life, health and the environment," the minister wants to change the law to "manage" the risk posed by these contaminated sites. This means that we will now cover up contamination, and our children will be forced to deal with future problems. To the minister: can the minister explain how removing the responsibility of industry to properly clean and remediate a site is in the interests of the environment, health, and future generations?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, we spoke about this very topic last night till almost midnight in this Assembly under Bill 29, but it allows me the opportunity to say that the preamble is entirely vacuous when it comes to what was being allocated. Number one, did you know that we are the only province in Canada where we allocated almost \$60 million for contaminated sites? In fact, we did a risk assessment, and that risk assessment of managing those contaminated sites, I might add, in terms of working with Albertans, has worked extremely well.

So in terms of the words that it is – if I repeat the words – a tragedy what is happening, nothing could be further from the truth.

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

2:00

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister indicate how allowing industry to transfer contaminated land as a gift to municipalities is in the best interests of the environment and future generations?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say that in this province it is the law, and the law says that the polluter will pay. We, representing the people of Alberta, will hold anyone involved with any type of contamination or pollution to that law. That's what we're doing today; that's what we're doing tomorrow and well into the future in protecting future generations.

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

**Dr. Swann:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister indicate: when a company defaults on cleanup costs, how often has this department gone after company officers individually as is indicated in the legislation?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Mr. Speaker, I can assure all of the members in this Assembly: the law says that the polluter pays. Let me say it simply: we will continue to go after anyone who is breaking the law to the full extent of the law both in spirit and in letter.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

#### Employment Opportunities for Foreign Students

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has become a global player in the economy. Relative to the U.S.A., Australia, and other provinces we are behind in promoting and recruiting foreign students to study in Alberta. Many successful jurisdictions see international students bringing to them economic benefits, fast-track human resource development, as well as good international relations, and they make it their beneficial public policy. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education. Given that foreign students in provinces such as Manitoba and British Columbia can find jobs off campus and work outside their study hours, when will foreign students in Alberta be allowed to do so, and what procedure do they have to follow?

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

**Mr. Herard:** Thank you very much. The hon. member is right. Foreign students are important to us in this province. We jointly announced with the federal government late last month that international students in Alberta would now be allowed to work off campus. We are currently working with postsecondary institutions throughout the province to try and implement this as soon as possible, by June 1. I'm happy to report that presently we have a number of institutions that are up and running: the Alberta College of Art and Design, Lethbridge Community College, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, Portage College, Red Deer College, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, and the University of Lethbridge. So you can see that we're coming up to speed fairly quickly. In terms of the process, hon. member, international students interested in working off campus can apply to the federal government for a work permit.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you. My supplemental question is to the same hon. minister. Given that foreign students at our publicly funded institutions are allowed to work off campus, and it is unfair that foreign students at our private institutions are not allowed to do so, Minister, what are you going to do to rectify this unfairness?

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister if he heard the question.

**Mr. Herard:** Yes, I did hear it, Mr. Speaker. He's absolutely right. As it currently stands, none of our international students at Alberta's seven private institutions are able to participate in this program because, I guess, the former federal government did not understand how important those institutions are to the province of Alberta. In my opinion these seven institutions play an important role in the postsecondary system and provide good-quality education to Albertans. I'm going to cut to the chase and tell you that I plan to review this process and program and do whatever is necessary to ensure that international students studying at private institutions become eligible and participate the same way as everybody else.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Cao:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, who is responsible for workforce matters in Alberta. Given that the lack of workers has become a crisis for many small Alberta businesses, particularly employers in the service sector, what is the procedure for them to recruit foreign students at our Alberta educational institutions to work for their businesses?

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

**Mr. Cardinal:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question. Of course, one option for employers who would like to recruit foreign students is to contact offices at postsecondary institutions that provide services and support for international students. Employers may also want to place ads on job boards, et cetera. In addition to that, we have 59 labour market information centres across Alberta that provide all forms of services. We're spending close to \$300 million, in fact, to provide those supports. Keep in mind, again, that Alberta students would be given priority.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

#### Education Funding

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems to have lost the trust of Albertans concerned with education. With only 2 or 3 per cent increases, school districts, teachers, and parents are finding out that the education dollars are simply not flowing through to their local schools. This surplus budget will put students in bigger classes and send teachers looking for work. Can the Minister of Education tell this House how many teachers will lose their jobs next year in Edmonton, Rocky Mountain House, Lethbridge, just to name a few of the many boards facing tough decisions this year?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't anticipate that any teachers would be losing their jobs. What I might anticipate is that there might be some teachers who are retiring, perhaps leaving some vacancies in their wake. Let's remember that within the envelope of \$5.3 billion we have provided additional funding in the amount of approximately 3 per cent for one category of educational needs and 2 per cent for another category. Every school board of the 62 should be receiving some sort of an increase in that respect. Specific to the class size reduction initiative, in our third year we anticipate hiring somewhere between 150 and 200 more teachers over and above the 33,000 or 34,000 or whatever it is that we have in the system right now. So that's pretty good news.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of Education tell us how many support staff, teacher aides, will lose their jobs next year in Edmonton, Rocky Mountain House, and Lethbridge, just to name a few of the many boards facing tough decisions to cut support staff?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I would hope and I would anticipate that there wouldn't be any of those kinds of job losses. It's interesting to have the questions coming forward now, when they are clearly at least six or seven weeks premature. We will get the final budgets submitted on or about June 30 of this year.

We'll take a serious look at what those budgetary needs are. We will know better what their enrolment projections were as the budget was being developed over the last few months in comparison with what the actual enrolments will be, where the trends and where the shifts and so on exist, and then we'll go from there in developing the final budget for September.

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

**Mr. Flaherty:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister did not keep his promises, can the minister tell us why he didn't provide adequate time to allow districts to plan ahead for these impending cuts?

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** I'm not sure that I should even dignify the question with an answer; it's so absurd. I don't know what sort of promises the member is referring to or what sort of cuts he seems to be referring to. We've explained very clearly for the last couple of days, at least for the last couple of days, that there is going to be a funding increase in education. I've also explained, I hope very clearly, that these are preliminary budget targets that are being talked about right now. The final budgets from the school boards will arrive in about six or seven weeks. We will carefully review those. That's the standard procedure. Then, based on how the shifts have occurred, we will make the appropriate adjustments with those school boards so that come September we are in a position of assurance.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:10

#### Gasoline Prices

**Mr. Shariff:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I filled up my car with gasoline at \$1.06 a litre in Calgary. That same afternoon I was in Toronto, where I filled up my rental car with gasoline at 96 cents a litre. My wife asked me why Albertans pay more for gasoline, considering that we produce it right here in our backyard, and I promised to ask that question of the minister. So my first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is there so much volatility in the price of gasoline, and in particular, why do Albertans have to pay more than those in Ontario?

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

**Mr. Melchin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're glad for the comparison shopping that your family is doing around the country and for the information provided to the Legislature.

That said, you know, on average over the year Albertans do actually still pay the lowest prices in the country, including in those areas which you said. [interjections]

**The Speaker:** The hon. minister has the floor.

**Mr. Melchin:** I suspect that it's the lowest prices in the universe. I stand corrected.

With that said, there are a lot of factors that go into why in any one day you'll have different prices, sometimes within the city, city to city within Alberta, and clearly province to province. There are a lot of factors such as inventory of supply, seasonal variations. In fact, they will purchase an inventory of their fuels at different times, bought at different terms and conditions. There are retail marketing practices that come into this. They sometimes are promoting an

area. There are cross kinds of promotions from the stores that also are selling some of their other merchandise.

The inference is that the only oil that comes is from Alberta. Clearly, Alberta is the largest producer of oil in Canada, but when you go to Ontario, for example, they also import a lot of oil from offshore and from other countries of the world. So we're not comparing even the same sources of oil and purchased at the same price, same times: those factors. They all contribute to why one area in Toronto could be more and/or less than an area in Alberta on any one day.

**Mr. Shariff:** Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the Minister of Government Services. Given that a number of provinces in Canada regulate gasoline prices, is the minister considering regulating gasoline prices, and if not, why not?

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

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it was some time ago, a couple of years ago, when the province did have a look at the legislation that other provinces were using. In fact, it was proven then by comparison that Alberta had the lowest prices across this great nation. This ministry has no intent of bringing in price controls. The free market must prevail.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you even more. You know, yesterday in Onoway at the UFA the price was 99.5. My assistant in the office, Colleen, gassed up in St. Albert: \$1.04. Colleen from the office gassed up at Safeway: 96.5 using her discount. I think there's great market competition in this area. Maybe it's just in northern Alberta. I can't tell you that for sure, but we see lots of competition in this area.

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

#### Department of Gaming Grant Program

**Mr. Tougas:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General recommended in his most recent report that the Gaming ministry develop clear guidelines for assessing the mysterious other initiatives program, an \$11 million pool of lottery money whose distribution is entirely at the discretion of the Gaming minister. During the Gaming department estimates the minister was asked on at least three occasions if he would comply with the Auditor General's recommendations, but each time he skirted the issue. My questions are for the Minister of Gaming. Will the minister act on the Auditor General's recommendations and produce clear, published guidelines for the other initiatives program?

**Mr. Graydon:** Mr. Speaker, actually, we have addressed the Auditor's comments. I'm before Committee of Supply tomorrow, and I would think that the Auditor at that point will express his satisfaction with the steps that we've taken concerning the other initiatives account.

**Mr. Tougas:** I guess that was an answer, but is that a yes or a no? Are you going to comply with what the Auditor General said? It's a yes or no question.

**Mr. Graydon:** I believe the answer was that we already have.

**Mr. Tougas:** Well, when you come up with your guidelines, are you going to allow the general public to enjoy the benefits of this

program, or is it going to be entirely an MLA-driven process as it is right now?

**Mr. Graydon:** Actually, I'm before Public Accounts tomorrow morning. I'm sorry. I said Committee of Supply. That was a couple weeks ago, when I answered this same question several times. But before Public Accounts tomorrow we'll find out the rules around other initiatives. I think it's a perfect title for that category of grant because it is other initiatives that don't fit into standard CFEP or CIP boxes, if you will. A good example is an arena that burned down in the community of Viking a while ago. The community did have insurance, but there wasn't enough insurance to cover the cost to rebuild that facility. It's an extremely important recreational facility in that community. What a perfect place to get a grant, from the other initiatives fund.

### Tuition Fee Policy (continued)

**Dr. Pannu:** Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government wants to make future decisions on tuition behind the closed doors of the cabinet room, far removed from the public scrutiny of this Legislature. The very lame excuse, justification, so called, for this draconian move is because a certain Tory leadership contest makes a fall Legislature session inconvenient for this government. None of the stakeholders of the postsecondary system favour letting cabinet make tuition policy behind closed doors. To the Minister of Advanced Education: given that students fought long and hard to ensure that a tuition policy was entrenched in legislation, how can the minister justify removing this protection through a last-minute change introduced in the dying days of this spring session?

**Mr. Herard:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I will try and answer the question without talking about the bill itself. The policy is not in the bill, so maybe I can talk about the policy. But to ensure accountability and transparency, I think that hon. members should know that government departments must always show, when amending regulations, that they have consulted with the affected stakeholders as part of the compliance process. So there's always a consultation that takes place when amendments to regulations are contemplated, and I plan to consult with our students with respect to this regulation.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that students are saying that they've never been consulted by this minister up to this point on this issue, how can the minister justify the government sneaking this change through without consultation at a time of year when most students are working out there, trying to make money to pay for their next year's tuition fees?

**Mr. Herard:** Well, Mr. Speaker, what's the date today? I think I've been the minister now for a month and three days and a few hours, but I do know that there's been a consultation process that's been ongoing for 16 months in which all of these students have been participating at all stages, and I can tell them that they're going to be very happy with the tuition policy.

**Dr. Pannu:** Mr. Speaker, the last question to the same minister: why should this Legislative Assembly give the Tory government a blank cheque to impose whatever tuition fee formula it deems convenient behind the closed doors of the cabinet?

**Mr. Herard:** Mr. Speaker, by moving the tuition policy from the act into regulation, we are increasing the flexibility to adjust the tuition policy to meet the changes that students need. So instead of trying to show that the sky is falling, why don't you look at this as continuous improvement?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

### Anticrime Volunteer Groups

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Guardian Angels is a nonprofit group that uses unarmed volunteers to try to catch criminals in the act to deter street crime. My questions are to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Since the Guardian Angels have visited our city and Calgary, has the minister consulted with them, and do we have any other local groups that do similar types of work in Alberta?

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

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Guardian Angels were established in 1979 in the United States, and they now have 60 chapters in six different countries around the world. They're a not-for-profit organization, and they do attempt to act as the eyes and ears in the community for the police. However, they do intervene in very dangerous situations, putting themselves and the public at risk, and this is highlighted by the fact that six Guardian Angels have been killed since 1981 in acts of their volunteerism within the Guardian Angels. As well, 36 individuals have been seriously injured within the Guardian Angels organization.

2:20

There's no requirement for such a group to have a relationship with a police service; however, we're concerned that whether, in fact, the Calgary or the Edmonton police service want those community groups to be involved in the community or they set up chapters here, the fact is that a relationship has to be built between the local police service and the Guardian Angels. This is all about crime prevention. It's about being vigilant, not a vigilante.

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

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since those groups are arriving here as a result of public dissatisfaction with street crime, can the minister see any productive role for those groups to cooperate with police and, indeed, curb crime?

**Mr. Cenaiko:** Mr. Speaker, as the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security it's ultimately my role to ensure the safety and security of all Albertans. That's a priority, the safety of Albertans. In this case we want to look at the issue related to what their goal and their business is. I have reservations about supporting an organization that places volunteers or citizens in harm's way. This is the concern that I have about community involvement with the police.

We have a number of programs that are available in the community right now through crime prevention units here in Edmonton and throughout Alberta that are related to working with the police, working with the communities. Some are Block Watch, Neighbourhood Watch, Rural Crime Watch. We have radio watch programs in both Edmonton and Calgary. These are volunteers that work with the police. They sit down and look at various targets, various areas

of concern that the police may have within an industrial area or a residential area. So it's well organized and well orchestrated between those community volunteers and the police. We want to maintain that partnership, maintain that relationship. Obviously, the Guardian Angels is something new that we're going to have to look at.

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

### Secondary Suites

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the government released its final report from the MLA Review Committee on Secondary Suites. Although overdue, it's better late than never. The use of secondary suites is a primary tool for creating affordable housing solutions and helping some homeowners generate a little income on the side. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given the red-hot housing market throughout this province, be it rental or home ownership, and especially in cities like Calgary, Edmonton, and, more profoundly, Fort McMurray, how will this ministry work with municipalities to encourage the development and utilization of secondary suites?

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

**Mr. Renner:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple issues to keep in mind with respect to secondary suites. Municipal Affairs through building codes is responsible for the actual construction codes, and that's what this report deals with. The municipalities, on the other hand, are responsible for zoning and land classification. So it's really a two-step approach that will have to take place on this.

First of all, we'll have to make some final decisions on whether or not the recommendations from the committee should be implemented into our building code. Once that's done, the municipalities will have to decide how they're going to incorporate this new classification of building into their structure of land planning and R2 versus R1 or whether it becomes R1 and a half. So we'll work with municipalities on that issue.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will this government provide assistance to individuals who want to develop secondary suites as a solution to offer affordable housing and to combat homelessness? Will there be any incentive for them to do that?

**Mr. Renner:** Mr. Speaker, that's not within the purview of my ministry. We don't provide grants of any kind to individuals. I can say that the purpose of this report, though, was to remove some of the cost-prohibitive barriers from establishing secondary suites, and I think the report has done a very good job of doing just that.

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

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the new standards compel existing homeowners to update or upgrade their existing secondary suites, will there be any assistance from the government to recover some of that cost?

**Mr. Renner:** Same answer, Mr. Speaker. My department is not involved in granting to individuals, but I must say that the present

building code does not recognize basement suites, the traditional basement suites. The building code really talks about a duplex, and the requirements for a duplex are really very restrictive. What we are hoping to establish by the implementation of this report are somewhat reduced requirements on the part of the homeowner so that we can in fact legitimize a number of secondary suites that are on the market right now and hopefully encourage some new ones in some new developments in the future.

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

### Drivers' Licence Photos

**Mrs. Ady:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the Court of Queen's Bench ruled yesterday that members of Hutterite colonies in Alberta will not have to have photos on their drivers' licences. My question is for the Minister of Government Services. What are your department and yourself going to be doing about this decision?

**Mr. VanderBurg:** Mr. Speaker, yes, that's right. In fact, the Court of Queen's Bench did put out a ruling yesterday, and I had discussions with our department on this. Photos are a very, very important part of our driver's licence here in Alberta, and we see that as an integral part of the security and of the identification of all Albertans. I understand that this issue may be still in the courts. There may be an opportunity sometime for appeal, but I can tell you that this is a serious matter. I'm going to have some discussions with other ministers on this, and I can tell you that we will ensure that the proper identifications are on our drivers' licences. I can tell you again that we will ensure that all Albertans have the ability to use their drivers' licences as a form of identification as well.

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

**Mrs. Ady:** Thank you. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Justice. Has your department made any decisions regarding this matter?

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

**Mr. Stevens:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe we found out late yesterday about this particular decision, so the decision itself is still being reviewed. I agree with the hon. Minister of Government Services that it's absolutely essential that we have photos on our drivers' licences and that we maintain that. So I'm sure that the Ministry of Justice will be working with the hon. minister's department to ensure that that continues and in the meantime reviewing the matter as it relates to a potential appeal.

**Mrs. Ady:** My final supplemental will be to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. As well, the same question: has your department been dealing with this, and what are they going to be doing about it?

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

**Mr. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, we just learned about this at about 10 o'clock this morning, so I haven't had a chance to discuss it with the department. I would have to reiterate, as the other ministers have indicated, that this is very, very important to us, that there be that identification. As a matter of fact, there was a lot of discussion about whether, in fact, the Alberta driver's licence



may be a vehicle that could be used as far as the border crossing is concerned. There is that confidence with the facial identification on the driver's licence that it could be very, very secure. So we'll be discussing an appeal with the other ministers.

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

### Government Liabilities

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Finance. Could the minister please advise this House and all Albertans how much the total Alberta government's liabilities have risen in the last budget year?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry; I don't quite understand the question. I see the hon. member is looking at his writing to see if he does.

I would say this. I have estimates here tomorrow night at 8 o'clock. We'll have a full two hours, and I certainly look forward to discussing our very positive revenues in this province. I'll discuss any potential or maybe liabilities that the hon. member maybe alluded to, and, Mr. Speaker, I would just suggest that we take advantage of that time and have a real good, thorough discussion on this issue.

2:30

**Mr. R. Miller:** Mr. Speaker, the answer is \$3 billion.\* It's contained on page 43 of the fiscal plan, and I'm happy to table this later this afternoon.

**The Speaker:** Hon. member, why would you ask a question if you knew the answer?

What's your second question, with no preamble?

**Mr. R. Miller:** Mr. Speaker, the question is: given that the government's liabilities have grown by nearly \$3 billion in the last year, can the minister please provide us with the nature of the increasing liabilities?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure he'll find that in the fiscal plan as well.

I come back to my earlier point. He did not in his first question talk about whether it was in unfunded pension liabilities. He didn't talk about where it might be, whether it was the perceived liabilities in capital. So, I mean, this is a rather broad question to come up with and to take the good time of this House in question period. So unless he has the answer on another page in this very thorough fiscal update we presented to the House some four weeks ago, I suggest that we have a real good discussion on this and any other matter in the purview of Finance tomorrow night beginning at 8 o'clock.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They present a very simple graph, so I ask a very simple question: why in this time of unprecedented revenue is this government allowing Alberta taxpayers to be exposed to such an increase in liabilities? It's up \$3 billion in a year. Why?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, again, Mr. Speaker, as I've said many times in this House, there isn't a government in North America that enjoys the fiscal position of this government. So if we want to have a

discussion on liabilities – funded, unfunded; perceived, not perceived – I suggest that we have that discussion. Maybe we can have a little economics 101, a little business administration whatever, and a little general accounting principles discussion tomorrow night, and he might understand it a lot better.

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

### Royalty Rates

**Mr. Eggen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Petro-Canada announced a 75 per cent jump in their first-quarter earnings, with a net revenue of \$486 million in the first few months of this year. In those same months we've suffered price jumps for gasoline and all forms of home utilities. Meanwhile, this government has been satisfied with an outdated royalty regime and a lengthy royalty review process that does nothing to capture the profit padding of the already thick pockets of the energy industry. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. How much revenue will Albertans have to forgo before this government will institute a windfall royalty regime that best measures the royalty rates as captured around the world?

**Mrs. McClellan:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the question on developing royalty rates is more aptly put to the Minister of Energy, who, in fact, has that responsibility. Our responsibility is to take that rate information and transform it into our revenue picture, so I would invite the Minister of Energy to respond.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Environment minister. Given that the price of gasoline is putting pressure on green transportation such as public transit, when will this minister develop a program to direct windfall oil revenues directly to green transportation initiatives?

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

**Mr. Boutillier:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I attended the COP 10 conference down in Buenos Aires and then in Montreal just recently. I think it's very obvious in my discussions with the Minister of Innovation and Science, the Minister of Energy, and also the Minister of Finance that one of the many options we are contemplating is: what are we doing to incent and to encourage behaviour and helping in terms of environmental practices? I think that is not unreasonable. I think rewarding industry for technology investment and helping them in making a better environment is far better than a federal Liberal scheme of saying: go buy a carbon credit in another country, and let the money leave Canada. So we're taking those kinds of very proactive measures.

I might add that we're the only province in Canada with a climate change law. We are not just talking; we are taking action as has been reported in the front pages of newspapers by independent professors of universities that are not traditionally friendly to this government.

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

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally to the Energy minister: if a small but spunky country like Equador has the guts to stand up to multinational oil companies on behalf of its citizens, why won't this minister fight for Albertans and institute a modest but practical windfall oil revenue initiative?

\*See p. 1458, right col., para. 6

**Mr. Melchin:** Mr. Speaker, I find it not surprising at all to hear once again from the opposition party that their formula is to make this an unattractive place to which to attract investment. Go to Ecuador. He just mentioned Ecuador. If that's the example, the model that he wished to use, I'm here to say that I was at the World Petroleum Congress back last fall, and if you look around the countries of the world that have a better opportunity than we have – and I'd like to know where – if you look around the countries of the world that actually are attracting as much investment as we can, that are driving as much opportunity for Albertans in jobs, in profits, in royalties, and in taxes, our province is doing better. But I guess they continually want to have a high, high, high percentage of a small, small piece of pie. That's their formula.

**The Speaker:** Hon. members, today we had 92 questions and answers in a 50-minute question period, which is really quite significant.

I'll deal with members' statements in a moment or two, but first of all we have a little bit of history to deal with.

#### Vignettes from the Assembly's History

**The Speaker:** Ninety-seven by-elections have been held in Alberta since the first general election of 1905. In our first 50 years 66 by-elections were held, with the first on April 12, 1906. This by-election was necessitated by the resignation of Leverett G. DeVeber, a Liberal who had been elected in Lethbridge in the general election of 1905. DeVeber had been appointed to the Canadian Senate. W.C. Simmons, a Liberal, is Alberta's first MLA to have been elected in a by-election.

Until 1926 members were required to run for re-election before accepting appointment to cabinet. From 1909 to 1926 15 by-elections were held for this purpose, and in nine of these instances the member was returned by acclamation.

In Alberta's second 50 years we have had 31 by-elections, with the most recent by-election held on April 8, 2002. The incumbent MLA, Butch Fischer, had resigned, and the current Member for Battle River-Wainwright was elected in the then-named constituency of Wainwright as a Progressive Conservative. The current Legislative Assembly has seven members who were elected to this Assembly via by-elections.

While I indicated earlier that we have had 97 by-elections, the number of different MLAs elected is 95. Two different members were elected on two different occasions in by-elections. On June 29, 1910, C.R. Mitchell, a Liberal, was elected in Medicine Hat as a result of the resignation of incumbent W.T. Finlay. Mitchell lost his seat in the general election held April 17, 1913, to Nelson Spencer, a Conservative. George Lane, the Liberal incumbent in Bow Valley, then resigned his seat, and Mitchell ran in the by-election held June 12, 1913, and won by acclamation.

Don Getty returned to the Alberta Legislature via a by-election held on December 11, 1985, after being elected Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party and Premier in the fall of 1985. Getty had been elected originally in 1967 in the constituency of Strathcona West. He was re-elected in 1971 and 1975 in Edmonton-Whitemud. He did not contest the election of 1979. Premier Getty was re-elected in 1986 but then suffered personal loss in the general election of 1989 to Liberal Percy Wickman in Edmonton-Whitemud. Brian Downey, the Progressive Conservative incumbent, resigned his seat in Stettler, and Don Getty was re-elected in that seat by way of a by-election held on May 9, 1989.

By way of summation Alberta experienced 66 by-elections in its first 50 years and 31 in its second 50 years; 95 different members were elected in these 97 by-elections, with two members being

elected twice in by-elections. There are currently seven members in this Assembly elected in by-elections. The first member to provide me the correct order of the seven will receive a grand prize announced tomorrow.

head: 2:40

### Members' Statements

#### Search and Rescue Volunteers

**Mr. Snelgrove:** Today I rise to recognize that May 6 was Alberta Search and Rescue Day and to talk to you about the importance of search and rescue volunteers in the province. Alberta's search and rescue membership is a hundred per cent volunteer driven, and it relies on the support of the community to make its service delivery possible. Across the province each year hundreds of volunteer Albertans put their lives at risk to help work with search and rescue teams. Last year about 1,200 volunteers gave their time to respond to more than 250 search and rescue incidents that occurred in Alberta.

The flooding last June emphasized the important roles all members of our emergency response teams play during crisis. Search and rescue volunteers from 15 search and rescue organizations assisted Alberta's municipalities during the flooding to coordinate a community response.

On August 14 it will be one year since when search and rescue teams were called to assist in the rescue of my constituent and friend Keith Martin, who fell into the waters of Muriel Lake, a rescue which ultimately turned into a search operation. Let me tell you: never in my life have I experienced first-hand the persistence and intensity of the volunteers and other search and rescue personnel, volunteers who for almost two weeks literally lined the shores of the lake to find this man.

Within my constituency since 1959 the town of Vermilion has been home to the Alberta fire training school, a training centre that has brought expertise and a global audience, a school which has set the standard for firefighting instruction, attracting students from across the continent and from around the world.

This past Saturday, May 6, was Alberta Search and Rescue Day. The day was established in 2000 to highlight search and rescue activities in the province and to recognize the contribution of volunteers. I am pleased to acknowledge those who are dedicated to this vital work.

Alberta communities provide search and rescue response of more than 100,000 hours of volunteers dedicated each year to emergency response, training, and education of delivery programs and program funding. Today I commend these exceptional personnel for their efforts, for their commitment to saving others, and for the risk to their own lives in doing so. To all of you across this great province, thank you.

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

#### National Nursing Week

**Mr. Danyluk:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in recognition of Nursing Week, which is celebrated across Canada and around the world from May 8 to May 14. This year the theme is Nursing: Promoting Healthy Choices for Healthy Living. This theme reflects the essential role that nurses play as promoters of health and wellness. This role is so important in our health care system. Nurses are capable of treating patients in a time of need, and as the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Nurses know a lot about good health and as front-line workers are in the best position to pass this information on to citizens. One very

good example of this is the work that nurses do in the Alberta government's Health Link call centre, where Albertans are able to call in for extremely valuable health information 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many nurses are also very active in helping governments to develop information and awareness materials.

It is very important for us to take the time to appreciate all the hard work and dedication that nurses put in to all aspects of our society. For this reason, I ask all Albertans to go out of their way this week to thank a nurse for the job they do every day both in the areas of healing and prevention.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Compulsory Drug and Alcohol Treatment for Youth

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along with our hon. health minister and the co-chair of the Crystal Meth Task Force, Dr. Colleen Klein, I was honoured to open the Capital health Stronger Together conference last Thursday. AADAC was well represented that day, and staff members had been working hard every day to prepare for new addictions services for youth under the new Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act, or PCHAD, coming into effect July 1.

This act provides an additional avenue of support together with the AADAC range of services currently offered to parents and guardians whose children are abusing alcohol or other drugs, including crystal meth, in a way that severely endangers them or others and who resist or are not seeking voluntary help for their severe addiction.

The considerable press coverage recently from AADAC's announcement of this new legislation was very positive. AADAC announced the locations of the protective safe houses, the program structure, and the number of beds being established in support of PCHAD. There will be 20 beds dedicated to the program in Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, and Picture Butte. To further support youth and families and to support the expansion of services, 24 additional staff members will be hired throughout the province. AADAC will also be adding another 24 voluntary detox and residential beds later this year in both northern and southern Alberta to ensure access to follow-up services.

In closing, I'd like to thank the hon. members for their support of AADAC and encourage them and their constituents to access further information on aadac.com.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

### Alberta Forest Week

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. May 7 to May 13 is Alberta Forest Week, a time for Albertans to recognize and celebrate the importance of forests and forestry to this province. We have a lot to be thankful for, including in my constituency of West Yellowhead, which looks to forests as the building block for our communities. In my constituency, as in many others in Alberta, forests are a significant contributor to the high standard of living we enjoy today. These forests provide us with recreational playgrounds, clean water, clean air, and habitat for a rich abundance of fish and wildlife, and they attract investment and employment in the forest products manufacturing industry, an industry that is the third largest in Alberta.

When Albertans first started to celebrate the values represented by our forests in the 1920s, this special time was known as Forest Fire

Prevention Week. Today this special week celebrates more than the fine work done by Sustainable Resource Development to protect our forests from fires. Today it's about recognizing how our trees and forests are an integral part of life in Alberta and how we have a responsibility to be good stewards of our forests in order to ensure that our forests are sustained and continue to benefit all Albertans. So it's especially appropriate that the theme of this year's Alberta Forest Week is Stewardship: It Starts with You.

Mr. Speaker, this week there are events throughout the province to celebrate our forests and the benefits all Albertans derive from them. I hope that everybody else contributes and understands that the forests are the future for Albertans.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

### Proportion of First Nations Persons in Jails

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in the Solicitor General's budget debate the minister informed this House that despite making up only 7 per cent of Alberta's population, aboriginal people make up 30 per cent of adult in-house correctional centre counts and approximately 38 per cent of young offender in-house correctional centre counts. As legislators we are compelled to ask some very difficult questions about this very serious state of affairs. There is obviously some sort of discrimination at work here. Even if it is not the intention of government policy to create a gross overrepresentation of aboriginals as inmates in our provincial correctional facilities, the consequences are here for all to see.

In his presentation to Manitoba's 1999 Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, Chief Louis Stevenson, then of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, said, "It is these substandard living conditions, unfair and unequal opportunities, unequal education, chronic high unemployment, and inadequate housing which generates the frustration and anger that leads to offences and criminal activity." The recent talk federally and from members of this government about getting tough on crime and building more prisons illustrates a wrong-headed approach to this problem. As legislators we have to face a choice: focus our efforts on building a just society, or ignore the problems and continue to build a potential powder keg. Opening and filling more jails is hardly a way to deal with this problem.

The NDP is committed to fighting for justice for First Nations peoples in this province. This includes pushing to equitably settle unresolved land claims, such as those brought forward by the Lubicon Cree. We also want to work with aboriginal communities to create and implement economic development strategies, including targets for aboriginal employment in construction, resource development, and the public sector. The government approach has not worked. We need proper management to ensure that aboriginal people are not overrepresented in correctional facilities.

Thank you.

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

2:50

### Excellence in Teaching Awards

**Dr. B. Miller:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday evening I had the privilege of attending the 2006 excellence in teaching awards banquet, where 23 teachers were presented with awards. I was particularly pleased by the fact that 13 teachers from my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora were finalists, and three teachers from Edmonton-Glenora won this prestigious award.

I want to take a moment to congratulate all the winners and especially congratulate those from my constituency. First is Lorel Marie Trumier from St. Vincent elementary school, who has provided tremendous leadership in shaping a stimulating learning environment at St. Vincent.

I wish to also congratulate two winning teachers from Ross Sheppard high school. Deborah Stirrett is an outstanding chemistry teacher, making an incredible impact on student achievement in chemistry, supporting the curriculum in science 10 and also science 20 and 30 programs. Scott Bezubiak, the department head of athletics at Ross Sheppard, is a very creative and dedicated teacher, preparing innovative curriculum resources for teachers both at Shep and other high schools. I must also congratulate the principal at Ross Sheppard, Jennifer Lawley, for the fact that seven teachers from her school were finalists and two were winners of these excellence in teaching awards.

These great teachers have achieved a very high level of excellence and deserve our praise and our gratitude despite aging buildings, despite overcrowded classrooms, despite school board deficits, despite dwindling resources such as teachers aides, and despite the failure of this government to adequately fund education in this province.

My wife was an elementary school teacher, who was also highly valued by her students and colleagues, but she retired after 15 years of teaching in part because doing her job had become more difficult each year. There were simply not enough resources or support, and teachers were and still are required to take on a wide range of time-consuming and exhausting tasks not directly related to teaching, such as administration and fundraising.

I'm worried about our educational system. I'm especially worried that we may lose outstanding, creative teachers whose patience might just run out. What we need is a greater infusion of both money and vision from this government. If it does not happen soon, we will no longer be able to boast about Alberta's educational system. We will gradually slip behind, and it will be a great tragedy for this province and especially for our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul. Thirty seconds were left in the time frame, used up by everybody else, but that was good work today.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

**Bill 39  
Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006**

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 39, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006.

The following nine acts will be amended: Oil and Gas Conservation Act, Oil Sands Conservation Act, Coal Conservation Act, Petroleum Marketing Act, Mines and Minerals Act, Gas Resources Preservation Act, Natural Gas Price Administration Act, National Gas Pricing Agreement Act, and the Gas Utilities Act. These amendments will ensure that Albertans' benefits from resources are optimized and will enable both industry and government to continue to operate efficiently and effectively.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a first time]

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

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 39, being the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, be moved onto our Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

**Mr. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition was talking about the \$40,000 vehicle that the Minister of Education was driving. That fact is that that is a \$20,000 vehicle. The fact is that people who don't have a government vehicle have the ability to charge mileage. The fact is that for people that do have vehicles, it's not a freebie completely. The fact is that there is an annual charge for the vehicle for income tax purposes. When you calculate it all out, in Alberta the vehicles are not costing more than the mileage would cost. As a matter of fact, every province and the federal government provide cars, and in two provinces, Ontario and Quebec, they provide chauffeurs along with the cars.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings this afternoon. These tablings are in regard to questions that I have been asking for almost the entire session in regard to the ring road developments in Calgary and in Edmonton. The first one is a memorandum dated February 9, 1982, from Alberta Environment.

The second tabling I have is a presentation to the Metropolitan Affairs Cabinet Committee, and it's regarding the ring road.

The third document I have is a memorandum from Alberta Executive Council dated November 21, 1984, and it is also in regard to the ring road development area land purchases.

My last tabling this afternoon is also a memorandum from Alberta Environment, dated January 7, 1981, and it is concerning the Edmonton and Calgary restricted development area for the ring roads.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. R. Miller:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have only one tabling this afternoon. I'm pleased to rise and table the appropriate number of copies of a document produced by Mr. Maurice Fritze of Edmonton expressing his concerns about Bill 208, which is currently before this House. He reminds all Albertans that there is a parallel between Bill 208 and the Jim Crow laws. "Jim Crow laws were a number of laws enacted mostly in the Southern United States in the latter half of the 19th and early half of the 20th centuries that restricted most of the new privileges that had been granted to African-Americans after the Civil War."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Varsity – Calgary-Varsity. Sorry.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you for that very important correction, Mr. Speaker.

I have four sets of tablings. The first tabling is the program celebrating the 40th anniversary of ACTRA, at which Harry Freedman, Bonnie LeMay, Sandra Redmond, Roland "Roli" Nincheri, Joyce Doolittle, and John Scott were recognized with life memberships.

The second tabling is the Calgary Community Land Trust's North Hill launch program, which was a beneficiary of the estate of Leo and Goldie Sheffel, providing the land upon which Habitat for Humanity will soon be building homes.

My third tabling is the Calgary program of the Mayor's Luncheon for Business & the Arts, at which both artists and patrons were recognized. A challenge was issued to Conservative leadership candidates to make funding for the arts a key commitment of their party.

My fourth and final tabling is the promotional postcard of the Cerebral Palsy Association, which is celebrating 30 years in Alberta and which held its 20th anniversary cerebral palsy bikeathon on April 30 in Red Deer; on May 7, last Sunday, in Calgary; and will hold its event this Sunday, May 13, in Edmonton. This is, incidentally, cerebral palsy week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Pannu:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a document. It's a media release by the president of the students' union of the University of Alberta. It's entitled Bill 40 Clouds Future on Tuition: Students Demand the Bill be Rescinded. It adds: "We were never consulted about this. If the Minister had bothered to ask, he would know that we are categorically opposed to the de-legislation of the tuition policy."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity of going to the kickoff for *Visit the Country*. It's an Edmonton countryside agricultural experience magazine that's encouraging people to go to the country, to discover the farms, ranches, and rural life. I've got the appropriate number of copies.

Thank you.

head:

### Tablings to the Clerk

**The Clerk:** I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, pursuant to the Legal Profession Act, the Law Society of Alberta annual report 2005.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Ducharme, Minister of Community Development, a copy of a petition signed by 11 Cold Lake residents urging the government to introduce measures to effectively curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking in Alberta.

head: 3:00

### Orders of the Day

head:

### Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

head:

### Main Estimates 2006-07

#### Restructuring and Government Efficiency

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

The hon. Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to move the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency business plan for 2006-2009 and our budget estimates for 2006-2007.

By now I hope that all of you have a better idea of what Restructuring and Government Efficiency is about, and let me say that I've certainly appreciated all of your support over the last year, the first full year of operation for Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

This afternoon I would like to give you a brief overview of some of our accomplishments to date, my vision for the future of this ministry, and of course the budget numbers. Over the next few minutes I hope to answer most of your questions and tell you about my vision for this ministry, which includes government operating as one single entity for Albertans. I hope that you each have a copy of our business plan and budget, and I would like to take you through what I consider to be the highlights.

Before I get to that, however, I'd like to introduce some folks in the gallery. They have been working very hard developing our plans for the coming years. I'm pleased to mention that a number of Restructuring and Government Efficiency staff are here for an opportunity to learn about what goes on in Committee of Supply. They all work hard to keep the ministry running smoothly, and I'm glad they could join us today to watch the proceedings. I'd also like to point out some members from my executive. There's Paul Pellis, my deputy minister; Cheryl Arseneau, his executive assistant; Cathryn Landreth, assistant deputy minister of business services; Brian Fischer, assistant deputy minister of financial services – so if you don't like this business plan, he may be in trouble – David Bass, assistant deputy minister of technology services; Jeremy Fritsche, communications director; and Jason Ennis, my executive assistant, that most of you know. If you'd all stand, I'm sure that we'd show you a welcome here today.

At this time last year I talked about how we were just getting our feet wet, and truly we were. We have undergone significant change within our own operations since that time. We've tried to improve the services that we provide to our ministry partners, and we have initiated work important to Albertans. That, I believe, was the Premier's vision: to improve and simplify the operation of government and for all ministries to focus on the work that they are intended to do.

I've said it before: my department and its valuable work is not necessarily the sexiest ministry going. However, our work creates efficiency across ministries, and that means a better way of doing things across government. Over the last year I hope we've made it clear that the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency is cutting a clear path toward doing things better. To that end, we recognize the need for organizational change within our own ministry. That's why I have a new executive in place. They along with the 1,100-plus staff they represent are the backbone of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. This is a great team, and the combined expertise is already paying great dividends for government and, ultimately, for Albertans.

If I could throw a little title on Restructuring and Government Efficiency's budget and our plans as we go forward, it would simply be: a better way of doing things. What better place to start than with regulatory reform, a highlight for '06-07, one that I hope will reduce complexity and regulations and processes for Albertans and for those who conduct business in this province. I will say that the MLA Regulatory Review Steering Committee, led by the MLA for Foothills-Rocky View, has a big task ahead of it, but the group is enthusiastic, and I know that this government will give those members the support they need.

As far as funding regulatory reform, I want to stress that this is an important initiative to this government and, in particular, to my ministry. It's part of our business plan, and it is part of the mandate of our ministry. We have some good employees in our department who will be dedicating their talents and time to this initiative. Their task will not be easy, but at the end of the day my goal is quite simple: to lessen the impact of regulations on Albertans. I believe that the number of rules and regulations that a government has on its books isn't all that important. What's key here is that the rules, regardless of how many there are, don't unnecessarily burden a business or stand in the way of Albertans getting on with their priorities. It's about harmonization and making it easier for our citizens to interact with their government, and it's about keeping Albertans publicly informed.

Another key project for my ministry is our ICT service co-ordination initiative, which is well under way. This is a project that will create a private/public partnership between government and leading ICT service providers, resulting in cost efficiencies and improved services. We all know that the costs of maintaining and upgrading computer systems continue to go up in both the private and public sectors. In fact, the government's ICT costs are going up by more than 10 per cent a year. When we have more than 25,000 computers and servers and printers, that equates to big bucks. If we're spending millions of dollars on IT, let's make sure that it's money well spent. This is about controlling these costs and getting the biggest bang for the taxpayer's dollar.

It is important for members to know that we are not reinventing the wheel here. Research tells us that many organizations have in recent years revisited their service delivery models and have used consolidation and corporate alignment to improve the value of their ICT investments. For the government of Alberta that means that departments work with each other and not within their own silos. This initiative is about recognizing that each ministry has common ICT needs, and there are opportunities for us to leverage those needs while helping to facilitate specialized requirements.

To that end, I want to publicly acknowledge and thank the ministries that have joined Restructuring and Government Efficiency on this initiative and are providing important insight as we proceed. We know that there is potential for operational efficiency and savings if we adopt a strategic, more aggressive cross-government approach to standards and shared infrastructure. We've made considerable progress to date. We recently reached a significant milestone by completing the industry/ministry consultation process, and like with regulatory reform, I look forward to giving you updates as we progress.

Keeping with IT for a minute, privacy matters over the last couple of years have certainly heightened the importance of ensuring that information kept by government is secure. First and foremost, I want to stress that protecting Alberta's personal information is a priority for this government and, certainly, for Restructuring and Government Efficiency. My department is responsible for protecting people's privacy in two important ways: first, when it comes to accessing government services electronically; second, ensuring that necessary information stored on our equipment is secure from those who should not be accessing it. I'm pleased to say that Alberta is one of the few governments to have IT staff devoted to this cause.

In fact, there are several key projects under way that will help ensure the protection of personal information for Albertans. Protecting people's private information is a cross-ministry initiative led by Government Services and Restructuring and Government Efficiency. The purpose is to develop principles and policies to further protect personal information. The Alberta secure access service was created to enhance the protection of personal informa-

tion while online with government. It's designed to provide additional security for new online applications and the personal and confidential information that Albertans submit.

3:10

Educating our employees is important too. Restructuring and Government Efficiency has established a government-wide information security awareness program. It covers everything from selecting an effective password to protecting your computer from viruses. Since launching this program in November, our security awareness e-course has been accessed by government users over 11,000 times. Survey results show that this program is a highly effective tool, with satisfaction rates in the 90 per cent range. We continue to move forward to ensure privacy by designing software that protects personal information.

While my department concerns itself primarily with online or internal ICT security, Government Services also plays an important role, particularly as it relates to identity theft and authentication. I look forward to working with the hon. minister on those issues.

We've also seen a new addition to our ministry. As of April 1 Restructuring and Government Efficiency is proud to be the new home of the Queen's Printer, formerly part of the Public Affairs Bureau. Switching ministries is never easy, I'm sure, but for these dozen employees we're sure trying our best to make them feel right at home. The publishing, distribution, and information services provided by the Queen's Printer are a good fit because they are all well aligned with the shared services function we already offer, and we're happy to have them. Their \$1.9 million budget is reflected in your budget documents.

Mr. Chairman, whether it's Valleyview in the constituency of Grande Prairie-Wapiti, Mountain View in the constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner, or even Spruce View in my riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, these are just a few of the hundreds of Alberta communities that now have access to high-speed Internet thanks to SuperNet. I am proud to say that thanks to SuperNet remote parts of Alberta are now a keystroke away from the rest of the world. This is important because SuperNet and the first mile are critical to the future success of rural Alberta. With the SuperNet build completed, our goal now is to promote the power of this incredible infrastructure. Hardly a day goes by without an article of some sort about the advantages of SuperNet for our schools, our hospitals, our libraries, and our government offices, and now rural businesses and residences are jumping on board, tapping into the system and realizing the benefits of downloads and other services that are virtually immediate.

In addition to these major projects on the go, along with dozens if not hundreds of smaller projects, it might be fair to say that shared services are still the backbone of this ministry. The vast majority of our ministry's 1,100 employees help deliver shared services across government.

I have some numbers that I think you'll find quite amazing. We handle about 25,000 training registrations and deliver over 800 cross-government training courses annually to public servants, who improve the efficiency and quality of service to Albertans as a result. We manage over 26,000 telephone land lines and 7,000 cellular phones. Annually Restructuring and Government Efficiency ensures that over 22 million pieces of mail are delivered in a timely manner, and over 39 million documents are printed. We process over 375,000 invoices annually, ensuring that vendors receive payments in a timely manner.

Restructuring and Government Efficiency supports over 26,000 government computers. Since 2004 we have donated over 7,000 computers to the computers for schools program. In fact, last fiscal

year surplus sales either sold or donated over 106,000 items, with a value of almost \$5 million.

Despite this activity, you'll note that the budget for delivering shared services to other ministries has gone down slightly over the last year, from \$211 million to \$204 million. There are two main reasons for this. We are finding efficiencies where possible without affecting the quality of services, and we're simply providing these services in-house rather than billing back to the ministries.

I think the shared service model is working well along with the billing methods, but as is the case with everything that we do, I'm more than happy to explore, as I suggested off the top, a better way of doing things. Restructuring and Government Efficiency is geared to make government work more smoothly by providing these day-to-day shared services, and they will always be considered a priority for the entire organization.

As you might have guessed from all those shared services numbers, Restructuring and Government Efficiency continues to work closely with all government ministries to assist in streamlining new and existing programs and services. Since the formation of Restructuring and Government Efficiency a year and a half ago we've taken part in a number of cross-government efforts that produced many positive results. In fact, it's safe to say that Restructuring and Government Efficiency is actively engaged, working on a number of initiatives that are going to impact the government and Albertans.

For example, Restructuring and Government Efficiency is supporting the provincial plan for a possible pandemic by assisting in the planning efforts, everything from vaccine production and distribution to keeping Albertans up to date. We're working with the Solicitor General in a cross-ministry initiative to create an Alberta police and public safety radio communications system. This wireless network will improve communications for public safety responses and allow for a variety of organizations and enforcement agencies to communicate with each other on a regular and an emergency basis. We're developing and implementing new standardized ID cards for all government employees to enhance security.

With Alberta Justice and Infrastructure and Transportation, Restructuring and Government Efficiency is developing an abandoned vehicle disposal program. This program will work with police and towing and storage operators to deal with the 11,000 vehicles abandoned on our highways each year. Restructuring and Government Efficiency is partnering with Health and Wellness and Education to make sure that an effective cross-ministry video conferencing standard is in place that uses the SuperNet.

With that, let's take a look at the budget numbers. Starting on page 355 of the estimates, the 2006-2007 budget for this ministry is \$255 million, similar to, but even a little less than, last year. Allow me to break that down into our core budget programs. The cost of running the ministry is about \$7.3 million. This includes the corporate management budget for things like finance, internal IT costs, human resources and communications, and it also includes my office and the deputy minister's office. I'd like to point out that this cost is \$1.7 million less than it was in '04-05. This is because we've streamlined processes, re-engineered services, and become more efficient internally.

We've allocated \$6.7 million to business innovation. This is where we identify and deliver innovative change opportunities to improve delivery services to Albertans, pay for the operating costs of SuperNet, and conduct the regulatory review initiative.

Also, \$32 million is planned for cross-ministry initiatives such as the focus on privacy, as I mentioned earlier, and the development and implementation of IT standards. It also covers the continued

operation of the government's corporate, financial, human resource, and procurement systems.

The largest part of our budget is set aside for providing shared services in the areas of administration, finance, human resource employee services, and IT and network services. Of this \$204 million budget, \$31 million is for amortization of the ministry's capital assets, including SuperNet.

3:20

As a point of interest, over \$103 million of our budget is charged back to ministries for services we provide. If you're keeping track, that leaves about \$152 million of the \$255 million total budget which pays the portion of shared services that we provide in-house. We are really demonstrating leadership in delivering shared services by standardizing processes, meeting and exceeding service expectations, and looking at options where we don't have to charge ministries for all the services we deliver.

Those, in a nutshell, are the budget numbers. Overall we'll be operating on a voted budget of \$255 million, of which \$103 million is charged back to ministries for services that they require.

Thank you for your interest in Restructuring and Government Efficiency. You know, just to prove efficiencies here, I'm sure that we could just call the question now since I explained my ministry so well, and we would save all this time and effort. Really, I'm sure that it takes a little while to get through to across the House there, so we may as well let you have some time now to ask some questions, and I'll try to answer them for you.

Thank you very much.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, you had a good try, but we do have more than two hours allocated for this business.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

**Mr. Elsalhy:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed my extreme pleasure to rise and participate in this debate on this budget estimate, personally as a citizen and as an elected official but also on behalf of my hon. colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition, who is officially the critic for Restructuring and Government Efficiency.

I must start by thanking the hon. minister for his introduction and also to acknowledge and say hello and appreciate his most able staff. Whether or not we approve of this ministry's purpose or its reason for existence, we must also acknowledge that the staff make things happen, and they're the reason why things click the way they do. So I just wanted to get that out of the way in the beginning.

Capturing some of what the hon. minister spoke about, I must say that when it comes to Service Alberta, as a service we definitely rely upon it, and we use it increasingly every day. For most of the constituents who walk into the constituency office and ask questions or have concerns, I must confess that the first place I look is Service Alberta, and 80 per cent of the time I can find an answer fairly quickly. If not, it has the usefulness to actually direct me in the right direction to look for that answer elsewhere. So I find it very useful, and I think it's money well spent.

This ministry has acquired certain services or certain responsibilities from other departments that existed before it did, and in trying to put it together, it now appears that the ministry is busier than it used to be a year ago.

We mentioned SuperNet. We all know that in September or October of 2005 there was the announcement that bragged about the SuperNet having been completed. We know that the SuperNet is a very useful program and a very useful development. I have certain little questions with respect to the SuperNet. Did it really in fact arrive at or reach the 429 communities that were identified in the

announcement? We know now that 16 per cent of those, or 37 of those 429, were only connected via wireless links. That's not the fibre-optic connection that was basically agreed upon or that people were under the impression they were getting. So I need to ask the hon. minister if that is in fact allowed in the contract or whether this is an area where a suboptimal service was provided. We need to know if this was agreed upon in the contract and there's no breach, or whether this was agreed upon after and it was allowed to happen, or whether everything is where it's supposed to be and how it's supposed to be.

With that, I also ask: why wireless when everybody you talk to tells you that wireless is less secure and less reliable than an actual physical fibre-optic link? For example, here in the Legislature we do not use wireless Internet even in our own offices, whether on site at the Legislature or at the Legislature Annex. We don't allow wireless because of its vulnerability and the threats that it might be exposed to. If we don't allow it here, why are certain communities being asked to rely on a wireless link that is not reliable in performance and that might be susceptible to breaches and penetration?

Also, Axia in their agreement with the government promised guaranteed speeds and network performance, or committed access rates. They call them CARs. How is the ministry and how is the hon. minister's department monitoring that those committed access rates are in fact being delivered at those rates and consistently? We need to assure Albertans that they are getting what they are paying for.

Also, I must say that I was really extremely pleased when I wrote an e-mail to the hon. minister's staff asking for a list of the completed sites, the sites which were connected to the Internet, the 4,200 sites which were announced in September. Between themselves they took a day or so to ask him if it was all right to share it with an opposition member, and he replied that, yes, it was all right, that they have nothing to hide, so give it to the hon. member. I really appreciated this, and I felt very good that an hon. minister of that calibre is willing to share this information. Again, it's public information: 4,200 sites were connected; 4,200 sites appear on a list that is printed and shared with everybody who asks for it. However, I noted that in the agreement which we FOIPed earlier, under schedule G 6,304 locations were identified as potential targets for connectivity. So it went down from 6,304 to 4,200, and I need to know from the hon. minister where this discrepancy came from or, you know, why it exists.

On the issue of the SuperNet as well, I have two distinct concerns that were raised with the opposition. For example, we have spoken to some students in rural Alberta who say that the SuperNet has actually arrived at their campus, at their college or institution, but it is not shared with the student body. For example, you might not have SuperNet access in the student lounge or everywhere on campus, but you definitely have it for faculty and you have it for the support staff. These students said: you know, if it's right there, why not allow access even if it's restricted? They don't need to access all of the information that the dean of that school or the library staff have access to, but utilizing the high-speed connection there would at least be a cost saving for them, and it would allow them to conduct their research more efficiently. So that's one question.

The other question is with respect to costs. I can quote, for example, a library in one town in rural Alberta which declined the invitation to hook up onto the SuperNet. They said: "We don't need it. We're going to actually get our high-speed Internet from the municipality." They told us that they were actually paying \$1,000 per year for high-speed Internet versus a cost of about \$1,800 had they been on the SuperNet. How can we demonstrate that the SuperNet is actually cost-efficient for everybody who are asking to be on it? So that's that.

The minister also spoke about the plan to update or issue ID cards for all government employees. I'm thinking aloud here. Is this going to be something similar to the new Alberta driver's licence? Is it going to be as secure? If so, are we also going to use the Canadian Bank Note Company to provide us with those? Whether or not we're going to go that route, I need to get some indication of a cost estimate.

3:30

Security, of course, is on everybody's minds, and I totally agree that government employees' ID has to be secure. It has to be trusted. It has to be reliable. But what cost are we looking at? Is this cost going to be phased over a number of years, or is it going to be like a one-time lump sum? How is it going to be updated?

The minister also mentioned efficiency. He referred to it as operational efficiency, which means that the ministry is investigating ways to improve services: delivery of services for the public, efficiency in terms of partners that the government utilizes, and so on. What steps are being taken to actually assess and determine areas of potential efficiencies? I'm not just talking about the top-down approach, where people are told what to do and how to think. I'm also thinking about a bottom-up approach, encouraging staff and ministry employees and people in government to each look within their area of competency and within their responsibility to identify efficiencies that are not being realized fully and to potentially report back to the minister and staff, saying: this is an area we think needs attention. Then the ministry can actually compile all those local or microinvestigations into a bigger scheme.

What indicators or criteria does this minister use to test if government is, in fact, becoming more efficient? I am particularly referring to a conversation that happened in Public Accounts, where the minister hinted or admitted that the indicators were unrealistic and that they were sometimes subjective. So will there be indicators that are, in his opinion, realistic for this fiscal year or for the one coming after?

The minister also spoke about the regulatory reform angle, or the red tape review. We definitely support conducting a full and thorough red tape review. The burden of red tape is basically greatest on small business. If you're using the terminology or nomenclature of the business world, it's the SMEs, the small to medium enterprises, not the larger or more established firms. So the small businesses, independent most of the time, are the ones that actually bear the burden of the red tape and the difficulties it poses. What are we doing to try to focus our review on the small to medium businesses rather than going across the board, where, in fact, larger businesses, with their established status – and they have their armies of lawyers and accountants – are the ones that don't mind it?

In terms of efficiencies and studying whether this government is efficient or not, I mentioned the SuperNet. I need to also cover something that is personally interesting and troubling at the same time. By that I mean the ambulance service. Last year and to some extent earlier this year the question arose of who should be responsible for an ambulance service. Is it the municipality where it's hosted, or is it the government centrally? I would urge the minister to actually look at this from an efficiency standpoint and study it. Look at other models, look at other jurisdictions and determine whether, in fact, there should be one system that is implemented across the board or whether we would go with several models for several communities.

Another thing which I can't help but ask – and I asked it in Public Accounts, and the minister has promised to look into it – is about the newly created ministry of the Associate Minister of Infrastructure, and then we put capital planning in brackets. How efficient is this? How efficient will it be a year from now, especially after staff is



added, resources are included, equipment is bought, and all that stuff? We need a sort of before-and-after study to compare what things were and how they were conducted before that ministry was created and then after because, of course, the size of government and the size of cabinet is worrisome, and we need to ascertain that we're getting value for the taxpayers' dollars.

Some financial points, Mr. Chairman. Line 1.0.2, dealing with the deputy minister's office, that budget is increasing by \$80,000. What can we show for it basically? How is this money going to be utilized, and what are the deliverables, the end results which we can tell taxpayers are the result of this increased expenditure?

Line 4.0.3 on page 359 talks about inventory purchases of \$3.8 million for information technology and network services. I need more clarification as to what the \$3.8 million is going to cover and what things we are paying for.

On page 360 there is no capital investment in this year's budget. I know that the minister has talked about extending the SuperNet, making sure that everybody has access to it and can utilize it. In the business plan it talks about promoting the potential of government. There is no capital expense. I'm not necessarily arguing that there should be, but I'm just saying, you know: should people in businesses waiting for the Internet through the Alberta SuperNet assume that no capital investments this year means that no improvements are expected this fiscal year? Are we telling them to wait a year, basically? That is the question here.

The Auditor General highlighted the fact that the ministry did not have performance measures, or if they did, then they weren't satisfactory. The Auditor General recommended that the ministry "clearly define" its performance measures and targets and "develop systems" to monitor those performance measures and targets. We know that the government has accepted it, but what exactly has been put in place already, and what is going to be put in place within this year or within sort of the foreseeable future? If there are performance measures in place now, are they going to be funded through this budget, or where is the funding coming from?

Moving on – and I promise to be brief because I know that my hon. colleagues after me want to rise and participate – the link to the government of Alberta strategic business plan. One of them is goal 8, "Alberta will have financially stable, open and accountable government." It talks about "prioritization of opportunities to streamline, restructure and gain efficiencies for the business of government" and "sharing corporate information and communications technology and administrative systems and processes." This is all great, and there is no quarrel here, but where does that fit with the open and accountable government part of that goal? It doesn't talk about it, and I'm interested in finding out from the hon. minister how his ministry is going to promote openness and transparency.

The other goal which is listed, goal 14: "Alberta will have supportive and sustainable infrastructure that promotes growth and enhances quality of life." SuperNet is the one that is highlighted here, again with the 429 communities, but if people are not being able to access that or if, in fact, some of those Internet service providers are offering inferior service or they're experiencing delays, then is there a role for the government, for this ministry to intervene and to accelerate connection?

Also, the minister spoke about protecting people's private information, which is a noble and laudable goal, and I truly support him on that. Then he mentioned, you know, information that is either hosted or housed on government computers or information that is accessible from outside sources. I know that the government has many partnerships with software developers. I note the hon. minister's trip to the U.S., where he met with Microsoft, and we know that IBM is another partner and so on. How are we ascertain-

ing that the software that we buy is not itself infested with spyware, for example, or harvesting code that might maliciously access and transmit information to third parties without our knowledge?

3:40

The PATRIOT Act comes to mind, Mr. Chairman, where software developers at one point were told that if their firm is targeted, they would have to relinquish control over their code and allow the agency in charge, like the FBI or the CIA for example, to tamper with that code to allow it to harvest information. So however many staff that the minister mentioned that actually sit there and monitor, you know, threats and hack attacks and attempts, how much of that effort is dedicated towards making sure that the software that we buy is secure enough?

Also, the minister in his submission mentioned invoices being paid electronically. I'm looking at page 319 of the business plan for 2006-09, and it says that in last year's actual 960,000 invoices were paid online. This is amazing. This is very positive because now we're allowing people to be at home, for example, sitting at their keyboards and paying government bills, you know, taking care of their business from home.

**Mr. Ouellette:** I don't know whether to thank you for all those questions or what because you were so all over the map that I don't know if I can follow you. I'm not sure, from some of your last questions, that you haven't watched quite too many TV shows about hackers and whatever you were talking about there.

**Mr. Lund:** Well, commit that you will answer any questions, any that are relevant to the discussions.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Oh, no. I will answer his questions.

Anyway, I'll try to go back to the beginning, 20 minutes ago. One thing I will talk about a little bit is SuperNet. I mean, it's one of the very best rural economic development initiatives this government has ever come up with. I will say that for that contract that you're talking about, when you go back to schedule G and the 6,304 connections and all that stuff, you have to remember that the SuperNet contract – what we had planned on doing was connecting 429 communities, and in those 429 communities we were going to connect every government office, every school, every hospital, and every library. What was added after that were the municipal offices if they applied for a grant, and they could apply for grants with Municipal Affairs to get that covered.

It was a movement in progress, all while we were paying \$193 million to get connected what we wanted connected. We weren't going to pay any more or any less, and we haven't. That's what our contract was: \$193 million. It turned out that there were only 4,200 connections, but that went up and down as schools were built and some weren't built. All of those are connected today.

You were asking about different connections within a school. That really has nothing to do with us supplying the infrastructure of the SuperNet. That probably should've been asked of the Education minister on whether they control that. I'm guessing that it's the school boards that completely control that. We put the infrastructure there. The school board now pays us even though Education gives them a budget to do that.

I've got to beg to differ with you on the security of wireless. Yes, in our contracts wireless was allowed. There were areas we knew we would never get fibre connected to. It was just way, way too expensive to go do one spot out of the way. But with today's technology they tell me that they can secure wireless as good as they can secure whether a hacker can come into your computer that's

going down the SuperNet or not. I mean, as long as there are crooks, you're going to always find – you would almost think that crooks should be not quite as bright as the guys coming up. You'd think: if they were that bright, why wouldn't they go make their money legally instead of being crooked? But it seems to work out that the crooks are always finding a better mousetrap to be able to get you, so that's why we have to have so many people behind them working on that.

You were also asking about the budget going into SuperNet. There was never any more budget planned for SuperNet. We were to do that main infrastructure – and that was our policy – and let private enterprise develop the last mile. I've started calling it the first mile because of how important it is to small business and businesses and homes in rural Alberta. That is developing very, very quickly. We've got well over 50 Internet service providers right now. We've got over 135 communities connected; people can actually get onto the SuperNet.

There are new technologies out there working with satellite, and I've been talking to a couple of different companies on that. They won't necessarily connect to SuperNet immediately. They will go out and from satellite do the high-speed connections, and when they get enough people in an area signed up that it pays them to put in a wireless wired into the SuperNet – let's say 30 customers or whatever – then they'll transfer those customers onto their wireless connection, which will bring their speed up and bring their costs down.

You were also saying: how do we monitor it? I will have to actually get someone from my department to contact you on how they actually monitor it. I know that Axia SuperNet has a broader, wider band than anything else out there right now, and they can give you just about any speed you want. The nice thing about this is that the really high-speed stuff used to be only reasonably priced within the cities. Axia tells me that they will supply a full megabit, which is probably more than you would get on your coaxial at home unless you upgrade it, for, like, \$50 a month.

When you talk about libraries that say to you – and I have municipalities telling me the same thing. You've got to remember that their train of thought hasn't been geared yet to what the capabilities of that SuperNet connection are. They don't know yet what applications they want to run on it, but they could run all kinds of applications on that SuperNet access that they can't run on their Shaw Cable or whatever they're getting their old high-speed Internet on. Maybe all they've got now is high-speed Internet. Maybe they think that that's all they need, and maybe it is, but if they did a little broader thinking and thought of different applications they could use, they could build that small-town library into a lot bigger business for them to make their library actually survive. That's where they make up that difference in cost, going from \$1,000 to \$1,800. So a lot of it is that they just don't realize yet, because they haven't been educated, the application capabilities that they have by using the SuperNet connection rather than using the other connection.

3:50

You had mentioned a little bit about ambulances. I have to say that I think that we have just an excellent health minister in this province, who works very, very hard at making sure that all aspects of health care are looked after. She has an ambulance advisory task force out there right now reviewing what the ambulance situation is, so I think I'll let the questions about ambulances come to our wonderful health minister another day.

You talked about what we were doing with standardized ID cards. The cards will enhance security all across government with greater

control around the request tracking and retrieval of the ID cards. The card format will be consistent. Everyone's will be the same now, so they'll be a lot harder to forge. The new standardized ID card is expected to be launched in June of '06, with the rollout and distribution process to last several months. Ministries in phase 1 of the rollout include us, of course, PAO, IIR, Children's Services, Human Resources and Employment, Seniors and Community Supports, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Ministries in phase 2 of the rollout will be approximately a month later. That's when Education, Infrastructure, and I and S will come on board.

Initially, the card will be for identification purposes only. So that's all they'll be used for: identification. The next stages of the card are expected to include electronic authentication and secure building access, and that will all get rolled into that same card. Whatever the cost of that card it is all within the budget that we have. We don't have to go out and get any more financing or anything for that card.

You were asking about a little bit of an increase in the deputy minister's department. As you know, a while ago I think it was probably you guys that raised a lot of kerfuffle about the big raises that the deputies got. Well, we had to put extra money in those budgets to cover those deputies' salaries. Most of that \$80,000 was used up in increases in staff in the deputy minister's office.

You were saying – and I'm not very quick at going through my book – that there was no capital. I don't know where it is exactly in front of me, but we do have \$4.5 million in capital in there somewhere. Now, that isn't for SuperNet. A lot of that is to upgrade our data centres. As you know, we have a data centre in Edmonton and a data centre in Calgary, and all of our government stuff runs on those data centres. We've actually had test cases with them. If there's an emergency, if anything happens, if a pandemic happens or anything like that, we have to make sure that our data stays up and running and that Health can get at their files. Everybody's got to be able to operate. We've tested where we've shut down Edmonton and transferred everything to Calgary to make sure that it would work, and it does, but we need quite a bit of that money. Actually that's an increase in our budget. We only had \$3 million in there last year for capital, and we went to \$4.5 million. Most of that was for upgrades for the data centres.

I hope I got just about everything. I'm not sure if there was more that you had given me, but if there is more, if you'll send me a note on it, I'll try and get the answers to you.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Martin:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will not go into as many questions mainly because I don't know much more about technology than he does. I could ask a bunch of questions, and neither one of us would know what the answers were. So I'll talk in broader terms about this particular ministry.

You know, nothing to do with the minister, but I've always found it a bit of an oxymoron that when this department was created, we added another bureaucracy to a government to become more efficient. I've never sort of understood the logic of that, Mr. Chairman. I mean, this department has been set up since 2004. I'm sure there's some good work. I know that the minister likes to talk about the SuperNet, but I want to talk broader about government.

I was sort of interested in the performance measures in the 2004-2005 annual report. The minister, if nothing else, is honest. By their own evaluation they are inefficiently pursuing efficiency. Well, that was an interesting way to put things, Mr. Chairman. I believe that

it was Benjamin Franklin who once said that “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” So I’m not sure what the difference is there.

Before I get into more general things, I want to talk about P3s. In their business plans they’re talking about exploring opportunities for private partnerships, better known as P3s. Now, it’s no secret in this Legislature how I feel about the record of P3s. They’ve been dismal, basically, where they’ve been tried. We’re touted to that Henday is going to be a great success. I still think that that’s not the case. I think that it has cost more than it should, but that’s another debate that the minister of infrastructure and I will hold time and time again. We’re not sure what the ring road will bring yet because it’s just in the preliminary stage.

I guess the major question that I have, then, is: what is the role of this minister and this department in this whole P3 debate? Is this the department that’s doing some work and looking into P3s? I mean, Nova Scotia is the obvious example, where a Conservative government got rid of them after a Liberal government brought it in. You know, it seems to be Infrastructure that’s pursuing this more, but there was some talk before about Education pursuing this and others. I guess I’d just like a general comment about the minister’s and his department’s role there.

I did look at, Mr. Chairman, the ministry’s website. The SuperNet is touted. We all think that it’s a great idea, albeit that it came in late and slightly over budget, but nobody would argue that it’s especially important for rural Alberta. One might argue that it was in a different department at one time, and it would have been done. But I notice on the website under its frequently asked questions that there are two categories: Alberta SuperNet questions – well, fair enough; we all want to hear about the SuperNet – and then there are general questions. This is what is sort of interesting. The former under general questions brings up another window with detailed information about the services provided or accessed through the province-wide SuperNet, while the latter, general questions, answers only two questions, one answering why surplus items for sale don’t have pictures with them more often and the other about how to register your company to purchase surplus items.

Now, I mean, those are probably interesting questions for some people, but for a restructuring department and going by the minister, the important work that the ministry is doing and what they’re about, you’d think that they would on the website have more than that. I suppose that’s important, but it’s not earth-shaking to most people. Most Albertans are not really going to know much about this particular department, so I guess that what the people would come to when they look at that website is that the sole purpose for this ministry was the SuperNet. I suppose the obvious next question would be: now that the SuperNet’s working and well, according to the minister, will this ministry be dissolved then? I’m sure that somebody else can do the surplus and the rest of it. I mean, either the website needs to be upgraded or we need to make some other more drastic measures. I will certainly be talking about the latter, Mr. Chairman.

4:00

This is where I want to come to sort of the philosophy of government, if I may. This is the major item that I want to discuss, Mr. Chairman. When this government came in under the leadership of Premier Klein, the deficit fighting, Premier Klein admittedly brought forward by the . . .

**Some Hon. Members:** Order.

**Mr. Martin:** Premier Klein: that’s his title, isn’t it?

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, this is the third time now you’re repeating. You know the tradition of this House. We refer to colleagues by their constituencies.

**Mr. Martin:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I always greatly appreciate the help, especially from the Minister of Advanced Education.

But, Mr. Chairman, the point that I make is that at the time the previous government had something like 27 cabinet posts. We in opposition were saying that was too big and cumbersome. It was a big government, and at that time the new government under the new Premier agreed with that. You may recall that at that particular time – I believe that some members were here, not many, but some were here – the first cabinet actually had 19 members. Now I see us, even recently, up to 25.

The point that I make is that with a restructuring department surely the message should be that we start at the very top, the number of ministries, in terms of if we want efficiency and restructuring. The more ministries that you have, the more complicated government gets and, I would argue, the less services that get out to the people that need them.

I would say to the minister that maybe there are other ministries that he would be welcome to take over. But I guess I would ask the purpose of this ministry because the SuperNet is completed. It’s done. I expect that if we’re serious about government restructuring and efficiency, this is the type of ministry that would want to work themselves out of business. That would be the ultimate goal, it would seem to me, in this particular ministry.

Bureaucracies have a way, as we know, of creating work and finding reasons to justify why they’re there. I know that questions were raised, and I know that when we added cabinet ministers just recently, this particular minister has no control over that. But the reality is that government at the top level is getting bigger. If you’re trying to send a message that we want to be more efficient, that becomes very hard when you send it down to the level when it’s going bigger at the top.

So I look at the ministry’s three main functions on page 358 of the budget estimates, and I suggest that this ministry could easily be divided amongst other more appropriate ministries. Business innovation could be done by Economic Development. Government efficiency should be done by the Executive Council office. Service excellence, which includes a procurement faction, should be done by Infrastructure and Transportation, for which, I would point out, an associate minister was just appointed, and IT and network services could easily be done by Innovation and Science.

This is not directed to any particular minister. I’m talking about the bureaucracy here, Mr. Chairman. I would point out what it could mean if we could save \$255 million through dissolution of this department. Just to give you a few examples: \$255 million would allow schools to hire 1,700 new teachers or could allow full implementation of the MLA review committee’s recommendations for continuing care and still leave enough money to double Alberta’s Water for Life strategy funding; or \$255 million would replace the dropped federal funding for child care or pay for a quarter of the infrastructure that Fort McMurray desperately needs, including water treatment plants and housing developments; \$255 million would nearly double Alberta Environment’s pitifully small budget, which might just give that ministry a fighting chance at doing something more important.

The point is that that’s a lot of money. When we’re dealing with taxpayers’ money, it’s priorities. I guess that I question the priorities of adding more bureaucracies, especially at the top level, and more and more departments, how that is really serving Albertans.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I don’t want to suggest for a second that some useful work has not been done in this particular department.

I'm sure it has. But I stress that it seems to me that the purpose of a department with the name Restructuring and Government Efficiency should be to work themselves out of business. I'm suggesting that perhaps now is the most useful time to do that because, as I say, the longer a bureaucracy is there, the harder it is to maintain, the more it looks for busywork, the more it looks for opportunities to justify keeping itself there.

So being ever helpful that I am – and I know that the minister greatly appreciates my help – I would like to bring in an amendment, Mr. Chairman. I'll read it and then give you time to get around to it.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. member, do you have enough copies for distribution?

**Mr. Martin:** Yes. I'm going to hand them out.

**The Deputy Chair:** Go ahead. Hon. member, please send the original copy to the desk.

**Mr. Martin:** It's coming, Mr. Chairman. Shall I proceed or wait?

**The Deputy Chair:** You may proceed.

**Mr. Martin:** What this particular amendment does – and we've checked through the Parliamentary Counsel and tried to find out how we can legally do it, Mr. Chairman. I'll just read it:

Move that the estimates for the minister's office under reference 1.0.1 of the 2006-07 main estimates of the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency be reduced by \$379,000 so that the expense and equipment/inventory purchases to be voted is \$254,760,000.

The purpose is simply to take a message, again I want to stress, not towards a particular minister but to the government. This is a way for us to say that we do not need this extra department in government, Mr. Chairman. If we're serious about government expenses and priorities and the rest of it, then this particular department should go ahead and work itself out of business.

We're asking the Conservatives to fall back to their old days when there were 19 cabinet ministers. This would be a start.

**Ms Blakeman:** Seventeen ministers.

**Mr. Martin:** The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre says that it was 17. I was out by that time. She was here, so I'll take her word on it, Mr. Chairman. But we certainly should be moving in that direction, and this is an attempt to do it.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. members, we have an amendment on the floor as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. We shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1. Would anyone like to participate in a debate on this amendment? Hon. minister, did you want to participate?

4:10

**Mr. Ouellette:** I would just like to have the question. Let's just vote it out of here and be done with it.

**Mr. Hinman:** That's what I love about this government. It's so efficient. I believe Churchill said that democracy was never meant to be efficient, so we'll continue if I have a few minutes.

I appreciate this amendment coming forward. He stole a lot of my thunder on what efficiency is, but I very much am in favour of this amendment. We need to look at reducing the size of this government, and I'll talk later on some of those things. But I'm in favour

of this amendment, in reducing it. Therefore, we will still have the budget for the expense and the equipment, but we could eliminate the ministry. That would be more efficient, and I'll give further reasons why later. I'd like to speak in favour of this and appreciate the NDP going against their normal idea of expanding – bigger government is better government – then going for a smaller, more efficient Conservative government.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, did you want to speak on the amendment?

**Mr. Chase:** I'm strictly seeking clarification from the mover of the amendment as to where the \$379,000 figure came from so that I can appreciate that reduction in the overall expenditure.

**The Deputy Chair:** Does anybody else wish to participate in the amendment?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Chairman, I kind of find it funny in a way. They're saying that 1.0.1 is the minister's office, and I don't really have a problem with that, that he wants to get rid of me. But I do really wonder. Actually, if you remember, in the speech from the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung just a little earlier he said how important a whole pile of the things were that this ministry was doing. I've also been questioned in the House a number of times on: we didn't get enough money to be able to do regulatory review properly. Now they're trying to say that we got too much money.

Do you want us to stop paying everyone's paycheques? Do you want us to stop paying the bills of the government? Do you want us to stop doing all the procurement, the buying we do? Should we stop delivering the mail? You can say, "Get rid of all these bureaucrats" all you want, but we need all those bureaucrats to do all of those jobs. Whether they're in my ministry or someone else's, they will be there.

We'll vote on that. There's no sense having a debate back and forth across the floor. I should be talking to the chairman, being that we are so polite on this side of the House.

**An Hon. Member:** Somebody who cares.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Someone who cares and actually knows the difference between good and bad and right and wrong.

Anyway, I honestly believe that it's a very poor amendment, and I think we should just vote it out of here.

**The Deputy Chair:** Anybody else on the amendment? Are you ready for the vote on the amendment? Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, do you want to participate in the debate on the amendment?

**Mr. Chase:** Yes. Thank you. I appreciate the fact that I had an opportunity to talk to the hon. mover of the amendment. Basically, what he is pointing out is that this whole department is an unnecessary expenditure. I support that notion. He is doing it symbolically and figuratively by basically removing the beast's head. I would like to see the whole beast taken out.

**Mr. VanderBurg:** I would like to speak against the amendment, Mr. Chairman. Clearly, this department has done a lot of good things within their government ministry and within many others. I know that under this ministry there are about 25,000 training registrations that deliver over 800 cross-government training courses annually to public servants, who improve the efficiency and quality of services to all Albertans. To all Albertans. Let's remember that. They

manage over 26,000 telephone land lines and 7,000 cellphones. Someone has to do that work. I don't know who's going to do the work. This department also ensures that over 22 million pieces of mail are delivered in a timely manner and over 39 million documents are printed. Who's going to do the work? These people do great work, and we should recognize the work that they do for each and every one of us.

I'll tell you, this ministry also processes 375,000 invoices, allowing our vendors to receive payments in a timely manner. That's pretty amazing, that they can handle that. They support 26,000 government computers. My gosh. I don't know. I have trouble managing one. How about you, Mr. Chair? Twenty-six thousand government computers: that's a lot.

Not only that, but they've ensured that when it comes time that we have surplus computers, over 7,000 of those computers were donated to school programs. I thank the minister for doing that and his staff for ensuring that those computers weren't just thrown in a heap and gone to the recycle pile, that they're reused. In fact, the surplus sales that this department has taken care of or donated: I think there were over 100,000 items with a value of almost \$5 million. That's a lot of good work that this department does.

You'll note that the budget for delivering shared services to other ministries has gone down slightly over the last year, and I heard the minister talk about this. You know, it's gone down from \$211 million to \$204 million. That's pretty amazing, Mr. Chair, that in this day and age we can get that great service, and the price goes down. I betcha that doesn't happen across the way.

So I'm going to vote against this, Mr. Chairman. At this time I want to say to the minister and to the staff that as Government Services minister, as a new minister, we appreciate the work that you do each and every day, and we appreciate the dedication and commitment you have to your minister as well.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Anybody else on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

**Mr. Hancock:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As we go through Committee of Supply year after year, we have amendments come forward. Normally, those amendments seem to be aimed at standing policy committees. This one is not, but the usual amendment that comes forward tries to eliminate a mechanism by which the people, through their elected representatives, can have input into the policy process of government. And the excuse for trying to do that is to say: well, not all members of the Legislature get to participate, and therefore it's not appropriate to have that committee. It usually says that the Legislature's funds should not be used in that way. Of course, the appropriate answer is that it's not Legislature funds; it's government funds, it's developing government policy, and it's involving private members of the Legislature, indeed, on the government side of the House in developing that policy.

This amendment is a slightly different tack on the same thing. It's trying to suggest that we should take away the elected participation, the elected oversight of important government and public policy functions by removing a minister, by removing the minister's office from the equation. The only way one could justify that type of an amendment would be to say that it's more important to have bureaucratic oversight of government and public policy functions than it is to have elected oversight, and that surely cannot be what the hon. member wants to accomplish.

Now, no insult intended, of course, to the bureaucratic oversight. You need to have a good bureaucracy to carry out public policy, and you need to have good senior civil servants to bring forward all the policy options for decision. But surely in this House the hon.

member would not suggest that we should take away the elected oversight, the representatives of the people, in the policy development process and the governance process. This amendment proposes to do exactly that and therefore, Mr. Chairman, cannot be supported.

4:20

**Mr. Martin:** I'm pleased that my amendment got so much action over on the other side, Mr. Chairman. The purpose is simply this: the Legislature controls the purse strings. [A cellphone rang] Tell them I'll call them later.

The Legislature controls the purse strings, and this is estimates, and if the Legislature voted here today – again, I'm not going to hold my breath – that this should happen, it would happen. It's not taking the rights away from anybody. This is the budgetary estimates, plain and simple, and the Legislature supposedly controls the purse strings. The budget has to be passed here. That's the reality of the Legislature. That's all we're asking. We're trying to send a message that government's got too big, too bureaucratic. We're asking the government to take a look at a department that should be working itself out of business. If all of a sudden the government here in the Legislature voted to do this, the Legislature has the power to do that. So I don't really understand the argument from the former House leader, but I'm sure he'll take the time to explain it to me at another time.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, did you want to still speak on the amendment?

**Mr. Ouellette:** Yes. Mr. Chairman, I agree a hundred per cent with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. I don't know how they can go about looking at a government estimate and just pull out 1.0.1, which is actually just the minister's office. So at one point he's saying that, you know, we can't have all this bureaucratic control – we've got to get rid of bureaucrats; we've got to get a smaller government – yet at the next moment he's saying: well, we're just getting rid of the minister's office, but the rest of the budget will pass.

So I guess that I should tell him again how much work our department has done and what we have done and what's important to this government. I'm just going to tell you some of the efficiencies that we do and what we have done. We've done huge volume purchases of computer equipment and have saved tons of dough for government through enterprise agreements across the government of Alberta for software licensing and technology. We've reduced the cost of maintenance of Microsoft products for the government by \$500,000 a year. Just by optimizing our cellphone plans across government, we've saved \$970,000 a year. We negotiated a new procurement card for over 4,500 government users, with an estimated savings of \$1.8 million a year. It goes on and on and on, yet you don't even recognize anything we do. So I don't know if it's really important to carry on debating with you or not.

**The Deputy Chair:** Does any other member wish to participate in the debate on the amendment before us? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Martin:** I'll be very brief. Just on the point that the minister made: it's a wonder how they ever got all those things done that they talked about when they had 17 cabinet ministers. Mr. Chairman, the point of the figures: it's what we could do. If I had my way, I would say that the whole department goes, and it would be moved into

other departments. This is what we can do legally through Parliamentary Counsel. To the hon. minister, that was advice that we were given.

**Mr. Chase:** Just simply if we could call the question so we can continue with the debate and discussion.

**Mr. Oberle:** Mr. Chairman, I'm listening to this debate, and I have to wade in if only briefly. I haven't heard the hon. member who moved this amendment come forward with a single coherent policy idea about how that ministry should be restructured or reduced other than frivolously pulling a number which includes the minister's office out of the air, really the legislative equivalent of the government suggesting that maybe we should reduce or eliminate the funding for opposition leaders. It makes no sense. It adds no useful weight to this debate that we're having. I, for one, wouldn't mind getting back to discussing the business plan, which is something of interest. We are wasting the precious time that we have this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Deputy Chair:** Does anybody else wish to participate in the debate on the amendment before us?

**Hon. Members:** Question.

**The Deputy Chair:** Okay. We're ready for the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

**The Deputy Chair:** Back to the estimates. The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I appreciated the opportunity in Public Accounts this past Wednesday to speak directly with the minister. That has allowed me to cut down on the series of questions I will be asking today.

The Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, or as we lovingly refer to it, RAGE for short, was formed from a combination of Government Services and Innovation and Science. Were these ministry staff reduced accordingly, or is this just another government make-work project? This is a question I had asked seriously this last Wednesday, but I was unable to get an answer. With more ministers here possibly they can indicate to what extent their two departments were reduced.

This ministry became ministry 24. When our current Premier became leader of the Conservative Party, he stated that he was opposed to big government, yet under his reign ministries have increased from 17 to 24. Of course, the obvious rhetorical question is: is this efficient?

The primary justification or cause célèbre of this ministry has been the SuperNet and creating economic efficiencies by bulk buying. I do not deny that these two things have occurred, but my question is: was it necessary to create a separate ministry to achieve these two goals?

If a new ministry was absolutely necessary, the ministry I would have preferred to have seen created would have been the ministry of arts and culture as this is an area that is currently undervalued in this province.

While the Auditor General noted satisfactory performance for most areas of this ministry, an area where Restructuring, or RAGE, fell sadly short was in the area of performance measures. On page

284 of the Auditor General's report he makes recommendation 37, and he notes that he's again making this recommendation.

We again recommend that the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency:

- clearly define its performance measures and targets, and
- develop systems to monitor and report results.

The Auditor General goes on to relate past history of the department in his recommendations. Then he suggests:

Criteria: the standards we used for our audit

The Ministry should:

1. clearly define its performance measures and targets and link them to the core businesses and goals of the Ministry.
2. have adequate control systems to ensure that performance information is reliable.
3. report performance results in relation to the business plan.

The Auditor General indicates:

The Ministry made unsatisfactory progress improving its performance measurement systems. The Ministry did not clearly define the performance measures and methodologies for six measures included in the draft Ministry's 2004-2005 Annual Report. The Ministry is also still developing the systems to monitor and report results for one of these measures.

Now, the Auditor General, without going into the whole business, has indicated that

as the methodology for the performance measures noted above was not clearly defined, this review process did not identify the problems with the data for these measures. As a result, these measures required restatement in the draft Annual Report and the results for three measures were zero.

My concern very briefly, without going further into the Auditor General's report, is that this ministry – what I find troubling is that if this ministry has experienced difficulty setting and evaluating its own performance measures, how can it then evaluate the efficiency of the 23 other ministries? This is very troubling. As a school-teacher I had my students set objectives, and part of the setting of objectives was evaluating how they would know that these objectives had been realized.

4:30

Another concern I have is that this government is notorious for contracting out work to external consultants/friends who frequently only provide lip service or oral advice. I would hope that this ministry would have the internal efficiency. What I'm suggesting is that instead of expensive outsourcing, should this ministry dedicated to improving efficiency not contain within its own staff the qualified individuals necessary to provide the information internally if the ministries, the other 23, for some unexplainable reason lack their own expertise? We have thousands and thousands of people employed by the government. It always causes me concern that we have to keep outsourcing. What are we paying the individuals within our system for if they don't have sufficient experience?

Another concern I have is interministry communication. I would like to think that this ministry was something that you sort of attached to the other ministries and that by that attachment the evaluations and improvements of efficiency would be readily noted, but to me the ministry itself is still trying to internally develop its own efficiencies.

[Mr. Lindsay in the chair]

My experience in the field while operating Cataract Creek on the southeast border of K Country was that there was a lack of communication between Sustainable Resources and the parks and protected areas. For example, conflicting information was supplied during the fire in the Crownsnest Pass in 2003 as to fire bans, backcountry

access, et cetera. The communication problem was further complicated by forestry during the process of fighting the fire using the same frequency as parks used to contact conservation officers. I'm wondering: is it within the expectation or role of your department to try to improve interdepartmental communications efficiency? I would hope that somehow you could get the departments talking to each other, thus improving their own internal efficiency and the output of their departments.

During Public Accounts last week I asked what role, if any, you had with parks and protected areas online registering, which has been an ongoing problem for campers. Does your department advise other ministries with regard to improving their electronic communications efficiency? I see your department as being responsible for the SuperNet, and the SuperNet is the king of electronic efficiencies, so I'm hoping that you can use your ability with the SuperNet to improve internal and external communications.

Is there a plan to improve the quality and security of Alberta health cards? You were talking about an identity card. Last year we noted that there were over 5 million cards in circulation for an Alberta population of approximately 3 million. I'm just wondering: instead of a separate ID card is it possible to potentially just do this as a health card, or at least could we improve the status of our current health card so that it is less likely to be abused and could be reliably produced as a qualified piece of identity?

Thank you.

**The Acting Chair:** The hon. minister.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, just quickly on those cards. I don't think I need to go through the whole gamut on our employee cards, is what I'm talking here, again. On our health cards, actually, the hon. Minister of Government Services is working on that situation. I mean, we wouldn't want our identification cards for the Alberta government to be used as everybody's health card.

I think maybe I will talk a little bit and answer your question. I mean, I've answered this question for you in Public Accounts. I've got to come clean. You know, the Auditor General said that we did a very poor job on our performance measures. I agree that we have done a poor job on our performance measures, but over the past year Restructuring and Government Efficiency has done significant work on improving performance measures and associated performance measurement tracking and recording systems.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We could not have realized this great progress without the assistance and support of the office of the Auditor General. At the request of the ministry a preliminary evaluation of Restructuring and Government Efficiency's '06-09 performance measures was completed by the office of the Auditor General in November of '05. As a result of this review, we have ensured that the new measures are in compliance with the office of the Auditor General's policies and recommendations and that critical success factors were identified and translated into meaningful performance measures and targets. The new measures are directly aligned to core businesses and, at the same time, accurately reflect key targets or milestones that Restructuring and Government Efficiency will accomplish over the next three fiscal years.

As part of Restructuring and Government Efficiency's commitment to continue to strengthen its performance measurement work, an internal quarterly reporting system was established and implemented within the ministry in 2005. This system allows for

monitoring progress on performance measures and ensuring that quarterly results presented are consistent with the stated methodology.

Another thing that I want to mention. As much as we've talked about SuperNet here and everything else, I still mustn't be explaining it just right or something. Really, the SuperNet is just a highway. All it is is an infrastructure. It's a highway that information travels over, but you still need an Internet service provider. You still need all the other applications to put on that highway, but that's all we built. So to say, "Should we be doing the online registering for parks?" it's not in our purview.

I guess that comes back to saying that I didn't bring up the name of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. I think we have a good staff, I think our staff does great work, and I think we've accomplished a lot in the year and a half that we've been here. However many numbers of ministries there are, that's strictly what the Premier wants and what the Premier believes he needs to do a great job for this province of Alberta, and we have a Premier that's done an unbelievable job in this province for the last 13 years or however long it has been. Over those years you would've realized that if he wouldn't have been doing such a good job, we wouldn't have such an abundance of people on this side of the House making the decisions that have to be made to do a good job for Albertans in this province.

To answer your P3 question, I'm not looking at P3s anywhere, but if you want to look at a really successful P3 and look at a P3 that didn't go over budget, that stayed on budget of what the government expected to pay, just look at SuperNet. There was a very, very successful P3.

Anyway, I'll get back to telling you that I didn't pick the name for the ministry or exactly what the ministry does, but I will say that we did some very, very good work within this ministry. We have found efficiencies, and we'll still look for efficiencies.

4:40

You know, one of the biggest things this ministry has come a long way on is shared services. Shared services is a strong efficiency, a way of the future. Other provinces are looking at it. The federal government has looked at it. B.C. and Ontario have incorporated shared services. They're looking at our lead because we're so far ahead of them on the good job that we're doing getting rid of redundancy and getting rid of silos and getting everyone working together. Do you know that it goes a lot further than just within our government? It covers all of the governments of Alberta. Because of things we've done, municipal governments are falling in line and doing it.

As you know, there is only one taxpayer. So if we can save, if systems of our procurement and stuff are taken up by Edmonton and Calgary and Red Deer and other places and we save them millions of dollars, we're saving Albertans millions of dollars, and that's what we're here for. We're here and all of you people are here for the same thing: to make life better for all Albertans.

I'm sure that when you decided to run for politics, even though you picked – well, no, you didn't. Because of the way your mind works, you're in the right party. But when you decided to run for politics, I'm sure that you decided to run because you wanted to do the best you could for the constituents and the communities in the areas you represent. That's what every single one of us in this House is here to do, and that's what I think of every day when I have meetings with my officials, when we're looking at finding efficiencies and making life better for Albertans. That's what I think about every time we have meetings with them and say: "What can we do better? How can we make it easier for Albertans to access or

interact with government on things they need? How can we make businesses thrive better in Alberta?" And it just goes on and on and on. I'm sure, hon. members over there, that you understand that much of what we're doing.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

**Mr. Hinman:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I must compliment the minister. I do appreciate his passion and the enthusiasm that he displays for his new portfolio, but I have to question the whole purpose of it then. I have to ask the question after our amendment and the debate: are you telling me that all of these people that were performing these good services didn't exist before this ministry? They could go back to where they came from. I think it was more efficient. That amendment had nothing to do with eliminating those people; it was putting them back where they were.

Your comment that you just made about the SuperNet and the P3. Was that contract even signed for any late penalties? There are many, many communities that waited an extra year for those things. I don't think it was a booming success. Some communities actually went ahead and hooked up because the promise and the delivery never came through on time, and therefore they went to it. So I think you need to do a little checking on how great that contract was and the service that came forward.

There are many areas that I want to cover. You've got two portfolios, it seems like, restructuring and efficiency. Both of them I have to question. I hope that we can get some more answers on what we've really done to restructure because it seems like all we've really done is thrown another cook into the kitchen. Now the question is: well, who's the head cook? What is going to be efficient? What are we going to do? I don't see it as an advancement but more of a problematic system on who really has the authority to say: "Is this going to be restructured? This isn't efficient." It just seems like all we've done is added a new level of bureaucracy inside this government that doesn't serve the interest of the people or the best dollar being spent for our taxes collected, I guess.

One of the areas I wanted to touch on in hoping to look at being more efficient – there are two things that you've talked about. One is the identification cards. I'm just wondering how much this ministry has participated with Health, the federal government, and also possibly with the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations on the fact that we're having to deal with our closest neighbour by having proper ID to cross the border. It just seems like it would be more efficient if we were to look at that. The passport is very expensive and short-lived. Could we not be efficient and bring all of this together into one, a new ID card here in Alberta, good quality ones, that would have your health care number on it, that would have identification on it, that would be something to meet and talk with the U.S. officials to get through, and that would work as a second part along with your driver's licence? We're looking at efficiencies. That's very much what we're after here, and we're suffering.

I wonder if the minister was involved at all in the \$10 million that was spent on trying to identify all the Albertans to get out our prosperity cheques. It just seemed like that was a lot of money that was spent to make up a single list that has come and gone.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity brought up the problem with the health card. I'm not sure if his numbers, 5 million health cards for 3 million Albertans, were accurate. That's even worse than what I remembered. This is an area that we have to get a handle on, and I hope that you would step in and help the minister of health in coming up with an efficient and workable health care card. As I say, let's put these all together into one.

You've talked about the procurement and the savings that have happened with cellphones, software, paper, and all those areas, and that's good to see. We want to do that, but I still have to question whether we need a whole ministry or whether that couldn't have gone back to Government Services, where it was in the first place. It just seems, like I say, that we're just throwing another cook in there, and we're spoiling the brew in getting things done.

Another question, I guess, if you're doing the evaluation and the restructuring of government. Obviously, it seems that the idea of this government is that you're being more efficient. Do you need 60 ministers before we reach top efficiency, where everybody over there is overlooking and seeing that everything is getting done correctly? I'd like to know where you see the efficiency and what number we're going for – 30, 36? – before we're going to be efficient and be able to serve Albertans. It just seems like this proliferation of government and government services is never-ending and will expand for every new dollar of revenue that we get in.

The SuperNet, going back to that. I'm sorry for jumping back and forth. I'm like you: I've been writing notes as the discussion has gone on and forward. The SuperNet – and I'm hoping that you can change this for the communities where they're still struggling – has been very much handled like it has with many of the water co-ops in the province. They've said, "Okay, we're going to put this co-op in," yet they put a list in there on who is going to get it. I'm speaking about the municipal buildings, the library, the hospital, and those areas. There isn't even a thought, it seems like, on how that hub is going to be hooked up to help all Albertans.

I very much agree with the minister that the SuperNet is a super highway, and it's a great thing that all Albertans should have access to. You talked about that first mile/last mile, and I agree with you, but it seems like we built the highway, and we've gone out of our way to do it only to find out that there's a river there and we don't have a bridge to get across to the people on the other side. What was efficient about that? We need to figure out that last mile, and there should be more thought into that.

I wonder also if part of the problem is that we're lacking, Mr. Chairman, is that we need a minister of common sense. It seems like we've got so many things happening that we're losing the common sense on what the purpose is and what we're trying to do to be efficient here in the province. As I mentioned earlier on the amendment that was brought forward, is the purpose and the goal of this government to look after the people from cradle to grave, or are we here to help people to help themselves? It seems like the continual growth in this government and in the number of ministers that we have is truly frustrating to the people of Alberta, and I have to question and ask: are we looking at eliminating any of these ministries as we get efficient and bring them together?

4:50

The biggest question of all, I guess, is: does this minister have it in his mandate to go in to the other ministers, whether that's Health, Innovation and Science, Environment, wherever, to look at and evaluate their offices and say, "This isn't being efficient; this isn't being done"? It seems like the name isn't being included in the mandate of what they really should be doing, and it's just wrong. We need to be able to be more efficient. We need to restructure to a stronger, more equitable structure for the people across Alberta. I would hope that the minister would be looking at these areas and figuring out ways that we can utilize the tax dollars much more efficiently for Albertans. We should be able to do it.

The \$250 million – and I believe it's \$380,000 for the minister's office. It would perhaps be much better if we were to reduce many



of these different government positions and just have a per capita dividend to the various levels of government. They would be efficient in seeing where those dollars needed to be allocated, whether it's their library, whether it's their golf course, whether it's their health facility in their town that the government doesn't want to fund – there are just many areas – or perhaps even build a larger gymnasium in their various towns and communities across the province. We've got \$250 million going to government in restructuring, a hundred million dollars going to a rural initiative. There are just many areas where I have to question the efficiency of these things, and I'm looking forward to the minister's response.

Thank you.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Well, Mr. Chairman, I guess maybe there are people that just never ever, ever listen to anything because it doesn't matter how many times you tell them something; they ask the same question over, or they come back with a completely different – I mean, there was nothing relevant that he's talked about to do with this ministry.

He's heard a number of times in this House – a number of times in this House – that I don't have the purview to go into other ministries. We work along beside them. We work in collaboration with them. We have experts in the procurement field, some of the only ones across Canada that are certified procurement people, that will help all the other ministries. That's why I just tried to tell you a minute ago that restructuring may be in my name, and it was there maybe to restructure all the stuff that was put into my ministry. We did restructure that. I think we've done a great job at that. I have staff that are moving along. We've made our management team a lot smaller.

It amazes me that the hon. Member for Taber-Cardston-Warner tries to say that the Alliance Party is a right-wing side. You listen to him talk, and he's so far left that it's unbelievable. Then you listen to him say, "Oh, how efficient can it be to put a hundred million dollars into rural Alberta?" He represents rural Albertans? Is that what he wants? Would all his constituents say: make sure you don't get any money for rural Alberta, for Cardston-Taber-Warner, because that's inefficient.

**Mr. Hinman:** You're going on a rage.

**Mr. Ouellette:** I have to act like you guys call me. What the heck. I want to be a star now just like the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Anyway, I will say that there's really not anything else I can talk to you about because it was all irrelevant, what you talked about, because it was nothing to do with my ministry other than the SuperNet. Really, you don't understand the SuperNet either. I've answered a million questions on that, and now you're late for dinner. You don't want to stick around and listen to the answers anyway, so we'll talk to you later.

**The Deputy Chair:** Hon. minister, that last reference about people's presence or absence is not called for.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the chance to discuss the business plan for the Ministry of Restructuring and Government Efficiency, and I'll try to be respectful in the hopes that the minister won't yell at me in his answer.

I think we've seen some good progress from this ministry so far, Mr. Chairman, but I also see that there's a lot of work ahead. I'd like to focus some questions on the SuperNet. SuperNet is one of

those projects where we've seen some initial success. Before the SuperNet we had lots of Albertans who were out of the information loop, as it were, in terms of high-speed connectivity. They were living, in effect, like information outsiders in their own province. Now we're live on SuperNet, and I see that it is at least starting to make a difference. A number of ISPs came on board to make that happen. But I also know that there are a couple of hundred communities in Alberta where there is no ISP. I'm wondering what the ministry is doing to make sure that those Albertans get access as well. So one of my questions is: what is the ministry doing to get more ISPs signed up or to encourage existing ones to widen their net, so to speak?

I'm also interested in SuperNet's internal function as a government network. I don't think this aspect has been given very much attention.

I'm most interested in the schools. Having a connection is one thing, but is this a practical and useful network for them? I understand that video conferencing has actually been a bit of a problem with the schools. The schools have the connections, but I'd like to know whether they can actually use it to video conference, or do they get tripped up because they are on different systems that don't talk to each other? It's not just a question of access; it's about compatibility. I'm wondering what the ministry is doing to ensure that schools can video conference with each other, not just in small regional pockets but across the province.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Ouellette:** Actually, the SuperNet with schools has probably worked better so far than anywhere. Long before it was completed, there were two different areas that actually used the SuperNet on a pilot project. One was up in Fort Vermilion, and I had never been up to see that one or what they were doing. They had a fairly closed system there working on that one. I went and saw the one that was going on in Red Deer. I was there one day, actually, in Rocky Mountain House when they were teaching a class from Red Deer. This was a class of 30 or 25 kids. The teacher was in Red Deer. They had their Smart board. It was unbelievable. There was great decorum in the classroom. They could see everything that was going on in the Red Deer classroom, and the teacher could see all of the people in the classroom in Rocky Mountain House.

I understand that today we've had calls from a number of people. I went and spoke at a conference in Calgary, and there were a number of different school boards that came up and told me how great it was and how some of their rural schools would probably be saved now because they could offer more subjects without having a teacher on staff for that smaller rural school. So as far as schools I think that they will be one of the biggest beneficiaries of the SuperNet.

You were asking about ISPs. As you know, there are 27 major cities classed as our base network, which Bell manages and operates, and there are 402 extended-area network communities that have been contracted to Axia to supply. But things were happening so fast once we got the connection up. There are only so many ISPs that can come on stream at a time that they have time to put on there. Right now they're getting more and more start-up companies, man-and-pa operations. Some of the bigger companies are moving into Alberta, actually, to take advantage of the SuperNet because now they have something that they can go out and compete on and expand the size of their business.

5:00

We never, ever as a government had in our policy to actually do that last mile. Our policy is to build the SuperNet. It was a great

vision by Dr. Taylor, who was minister at the time, and our Innovation and Science minister carried it on. I mean, it was a great, great vision. The vision was that we would connect these 429 communities, get the connections out to the schools and the hospitals and the libraries, and the rest of it would go on its own. If we'd seen that it wasn't going to develop fast enough, that that last mile didn't work, our plan was to build in strategies. We will still do that. We will build in strategies. We'll do whatever we have to do, but I believe that that last mile is developing very, very quickly.

We also have, which I haven't talked about yet, a requirement in our contract that six months after the SuperNet was complete, Bell would become a supplier of last resort. Our six months was up in April. So now Bell is working on that supplier of last resort situation. I know that our department has been negotiating with them on what different types of connections they use.

Another thing. We don't want to use government involvement to compete with any of these new companies that started up, with any of the private companies that are out there. So if Bell does supply as a supplier of last resort, and let's say that they have five or six customers that they're supplying, if one of the other ISPs moves into the area, Bell will give those customers up to that person. We're not going to allow them to compete against the private ISPs.

So right now we believe that the ISPs are developing at a good rate. As I said earlier, with the wireless technology that we had a year ago and with the type of technology that we had with satellite a year or so ago, I'm not so sure that we could have even reached every portion of Alberta. We thought we'd reach 86 or 87 per cent. Now we're thinking that at some point in time 100 per cent of Alberta will probably be able to be achieved. No matter where you're from or where you're located, somebody will supply a connection to you. It may be satellite; it may be whatever. The objective was to get all of the people in Alberta connected. That was the initiative and why the government went out there.

Every conference I've been to and no matter where I've been – when I was at the Microsoft conference in Washington, there were some people from the Brazilian school board there that were talking about how connected they were, that they were having virtual schools in Brazil. When I talked to the Microsoft people, they said: "You have to remember one thing. They may have that, but the quality, compared to what we have on the SuperNet, isn't anywhere near what we have." I think they taught something like 280,000 students over virtual learning.

So our big challenge – and that's a global challenge; it's right across Canada and in the U.S.: rural communities are depopulating, and urban ones are populating. It's a big challenge. I mean, if you lose a school, you're not going to get people moving to that community. In fact, people will move out of the community because they need that school. It's things like the SuperNet and stuff that will keep that school.

Did I get all your questions covered?

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

**Mrs. Mather:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the work to bring these estimates to us and the minister's words that the goal is to create efficiencies across ministries and that regulatory reform is a highlight for '06-07. I also appreciate that you have an MLA steering committee to examine regulations and reform and lessen the impact of regulations on Albertans. Rules, hopefully, then won't unnecessarily burden Albertans.

I do see that there has been progress, but I think that there's much that needs to be done. As the name of the ministry implies, core business 2 is government efficiency. What steps are taken to actually assess and determine areas of potential efficiency? What

criteria or indicators does this ministry use to test if the government is in fact being efficient? I don't know what you do to actually determine efficiency.

I also want to say – and I know that I'm running out of time. We've heard a lot about the SuperNet. I want to of course also echo concerns about the lack of total connection yet. You've explained how that's all going, and I appreciate that, but please remember that technology may be wonderful, but it doesn't work without outstanding teachers making the effort to create good learning opportunities. Technology is just a tool for that.

I also wanted to ask why there are no capital investments in this year's budget. When you're talking about expanding that Internet service provision in rural areas, won't this require further capital investment? Should people and businesses waiting for Internet service in their community assume that no capital investment means no improvement to their service? I understand that you just explained this thing about Bell now, but I still have a question about the fact that we're not doing as well as you had hoped.

The other thing I wanted to ask is in regard to interdepartmental communication efficiency. As Children's Services critic I'm often talking with families, foster parents who often tell me that the paperwork is burdensome. The accreditation process that the department is working on is improving, but I still think that there are ways it could be simplified. It is burdensome for many of our daycare owners. Also, many of my families have children that require help or support from Children's Services, Health, PDD, and Education, and often these families find it discouraging and frustrating. Even as an MLA I sometimes find it confusing and frustrating because we have to go to all of these different departments. What is your role in helping create efficiency in that regard? Do you have a role in that? Is it included in your ministry? I see the interdepartmental communication efficiency as a concern, as mentioned by my colleague from Calgary-Varsity.

I think that's all the questions I'll ask for now. I won't repeat other questions.

**Mr. Ouellette:** I guess one answer to the question of do I have a role in all those other ministries is really no. But with that I want to add that as our regulatory review gets going – and this was always our plan – part of that and how I always explain regulatory review is that we want to make things better, whether it's for an individual Albertan or whether it's for businesses, and we want to make things easier on how they access government when they need to. And that's what you're talking about. Sometimes it's tough for certain types of constituents to access. Whether it's Children's Services, whether it's an AISH problem, whether it's a seniors' problem, whether it's a mental health problem, lots of these things happen to be in three or four different ministries to fix the one problem the person has. What we're trying to say is that our regulatory review plans on working on that as we get more into it. If it takes three ministries to do something or to permit something or to okay something, let's get those three ministries to let one of them be a lead and give them the criteria they need so that they only need an approval from one person to make things easier for government and make it easier for the Albertans that need that help from government. That's what we're going to try to work on, those particular items.

**5:10**

You know, I didn't write your questions down, and we're pretty well out of time, I think, but I will get you an answer to those questions. My mind's kind of swimming around here from the amount I've had all day and everywhere we went, so rather than just talk out that last minute or half a minute we have, I will actually respond to you in writing on those questions if that's okay with you.

**The Deputy Chair:** The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

**Mr. Strang:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are just a couple of items that I wanted to talk on. It's my understanding that Restructuring and Government Efficiency provides common businesses and shared services that help all other ministries deliver effective and efficient programs and services to all Albertans. Some of what I know to be true is that Restructuring and Government Efficiency provides many tools and services to the provincial ministries and their agencies; for example, processing of invoices, pay and benefits, procurement, purchasing of goods and services, developing contract standards, sorting and delivering mail, printing and copying documents, providing technical support for computers, telephones and faxes, managing records, surplus sales, and building and fleet management. Can the minister expound on any of these other shared services that his department does for the rest of the government of Alberta?

**The Deputy Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, but pursuant to Standing Order 58(5), which provides for the Committee of Supply to rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday afternoons, I must now put the question after considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:  
Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases      \$255,139,000

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

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** Opposed? Carried.  
The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's been an electrifying afternoon of outstanding debate and informational

exchanges, and we've all learned enormously from that experience today. On that note I would move that the committee now rise and report the estimates of the Department of Restructuring and Government Efficiency and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

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

Restructuring and Government Efficiency: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$255,139,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of an amendment considered by Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

**Hon. Members:** Concur.

**The Acting Speaker:** Opposed? So ordered.  
The hon. Government House Leader.

**Mr. Zwozdesky:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour and the successes achieved today, I would move that we now call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening, at which time we would beg leave to resume in Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:15 p.m.]

