

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 10, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/05/10

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. We give thanks for our abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask for guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Klein: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce six individuals from my Calgary office. Now, these individuals help make my life at work a lot easier and safer. They are Rich Jones, Lea Roberts, Joyce Austin, Jack Davies, Cal Lawinger, and Jim Law. Rich runs the Calgary office. Joyce and Lea keep everything on track and me on time, which is no small feat, and they always seem to do it with a big smile. Jack and Cal provide me with the best level of security possible, and Jim tries to keep me from getting myself in trouble with the media, which would work better if I were better about taking his advice. I've been fortunate to have all these people with me for a number of years. I think some of them have been around longer, when my hair was a different colour. I want to thank them for everything they do. The dedication they bring to their jobs helps me do mine, and I'm so pleased they could be with us today. I would ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in giving them a warm welcome.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise today to introduce through you to the Assembly various members of your staff who have been instrumental in the development of a project called Virtual Visit to the Alberta Legislature, which I was so thankful to have you join me at launching this morning in our Legislature rotunda. These individuals are Dr. David McNeil, our clerk of the Legislative Assembly; Rhonda Sorensen, communications co-ordinator and chair for LAO and the Virtual Visit committee – Rhonda will receive an extraspecial round of applause because it's also her birthday; Kerri Button, head of visitor services; Colleen Cameron, visitor services administrator; Tim Francis, our tour guide; Val Footz, manager of library operations; and Makoto Ohki, web and application analyst.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a moment to introduce certain members of my staff from Alberta Education who were deeply involved in the development of this important learning tool, which, as most members here would know, will allow people around the world to do a virtual visit of our Legislature building in all its beauty. My members of staff include Louise Bentley, director of online development; David Bryce, conceptual design co-ordinator and vital project lead, along with his wife, Charlene, and two daughters Chantelle and Brittany; Kaye Steward, our project co-ordinator; and Karl Muller, instructional design consultant.

Joining them today is another instrumental player in the project of the Virtual Visit, and that is Ryan Anderson, the public relations manager for Fuel Industries. All of these good folks are in your gallery or elsewhere. I would ask members of your staff who were involved and members of my staff to now please rise and receive our deepest thanks and our sincere gratitude for their work.

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

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three of the 1,914 very professional Sustainable Resource Development staff that work in this province. First of all is Dave Ferrier. He is the provincial compliance adviser with our fish and wildlife division. He has been both with the fish and wildlife department of our department as well as a park ranger in the southern parts of our province.

Our second guest is Todd Letwin, and he is the head of the provincial compliance and enforcement programs in our lands division. I am proud to say that Todd has worked in the area of public land management for over 15 years, so he brings a lot of experience.

Our third and final guest is Kimberly Lougheed-Kain, a facilitator in field logistics in our fish and wildlife division. It's important to note, Mr. Speaker, that Kim is also the daughter of a very honourable and respected member of our caucus, of this government, the Member for Strathcona.

Our guests are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly members of my Aboriginal Youth Advisory Committee. This committee shares youth issues and perspectives with myself and, in fact, participated in planning initiatives with other ministries. This group advises me as the minister dealing with aboriginal youth issues, but they also provide a very unique perspective to make sure we address some of the concerns. They are the fastest growing population in Canada. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they stand as I name them: Myron Wolf Child, from the Blood First Nation; Danielle Cardinal, from Elizabeth Métis settlement; Amanda L'Hirondelle, of Métis Nation of Alberta; Terra Haugen, from the Métis Nation of Alberta; Fernando Didzena, from Dene Tha' of Assumption. Accompanying them today are from my staff Cynthia Dunningan, Nicole Hetu, and Gilman Cardinal. I'd ask that this Assembly give them a very warm welcome.

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

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that my group is in the gallery this afternoon, but with your indulgence I would like to introduce them into *Hansard* so that everyone knows that the 46 visitors from the Sturgeon Heights school in my constituency in St. Albert were in the Legislature today and touring through, accompanied by teachers and parent helpers Mrs. Cindy Hamilton, Mrs. Tracy Ayotte, Mrs. Trish Lema, Mrs. Elaine Schafers, and Mr. Perry Kozma. I did have the opportunity to speak with these students, and they are some of Alberta's bright lights for our future.

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

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to rise to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly students from a terrific school in my constituency, the school of Sherwood. There are 34 visitors, including three adults, Miss Mellick, Mr. Samchuck, and their teacher's assistant, Ms Connelly. I believe they're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm reception of all MLAs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 28 visitors from the Blackie school in my constituency.

An Hon. Member: Blackie.

Mr. Groeneveld: You bet: Blackie. I would like to say, as most do, that these are 18 of the best and brightest students. However, although they are an extremely bright bunch of students, they are also a rambunctious crew, which one would expect from grade 6 students. That's just what makes them great. Along with their teacher, Margaret Speelman, who has come here for four or five years now, I would like to introduce the parents: Lil Gillanders, Maggie Hooper, Shelley Randle, Vince Miller, Kari Eggi, Dave Kormos, Cheryl Brown, Ed Palmer, and a name I can pronounce, Glen Groeneveld, my nephew. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you to the Assembly the Member for Banff-Cochrane's rent-a-family. Her better half, Byron, son Josh, daughter Ashley are here to celebrate her special day, and at this time I would like them to stand in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of all of us.

The Speaker: If the hon. members did not get the subtle hint from the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, today is happy birthday for the hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members my son Mark Prins. He's graduating tomorrow from the University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine. He has been the recipient of many scholarships, including the rural physicians action plan scholarship for the last couple of years. He'll be moving from Calgary into a residency program, training for a family medicine practice, intending to practise somewhere in a small town, rural Alberta community. With him are my wife, Pauline, and my daughter Julia Vanderveen. I'd like him to stand in the public gallery and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My honour today to introduce eight leaders from Calgary working with the vital issues of persons with developmental disabilities. They are frustrated and discouraged

by the lack of support for dignified living and care for persons with disabilities, and they would like to see adequate funding they can count on. They are Bruce Howell, from outreach services, human resources, Calgary Scope Society; Ryan Geake, Calgary Scope Society; Judy Coe, with the Southern Alberta Community Living Association from Lethbridge; Shelley Murdoch, Calgary Scope Society; Tammy Winder, south region; Rhonda Phillips, Calgary Scope Society; and Sandy White, Calgary Scope Society, organized by Colleen Huston, from the Disability Action Hall in Calgary. Could they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly?

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise today and introduce through you to the other members of the Assembly, because I know you've met them already, 48 students and their teachers and parent helpers from Earl Grey school in my constituency of Calgary-Currie, which, I should also mention, is the alma mater of former Premier Peter Lougheed. They were here to assist you in unveiling and kicking off the Virtual Visit exhibit, and among them was student Jan Lisiecki, who, of course, we've had introduced to this House before as the winner of the What Democracy Means to Me essay contest. He spoke again today at the kick-off celebrations, the launch, of the Virtual Visit tour, and it is a spectacular essay.

With the students are teachers Donna Kovatch, Richard Bridges, and Jennifer Powell – these are grade 5 and grade 6 students and their teachers – assistant principal Tim Shoults, principal Judy Hehr, parent helpers Wendy Dick, Kathy Ogilvy, Elisa Iozzo, Jan Pugh, Sol Wright, and also Jan's mom, Anita Lisiecki. I'd have them rise – I think most of them are in the members' gallery; some may be in the public gallery as well – 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. It is indeed a pleasure this afternoon to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of the very most important people in my life. They are tasked with the difficult job of making sure that I am on schedule, go where I'm supposed to go, say what I'm supposed to say when I get there, don't get in trouble with the media, and somewhere around all of that, they are also tasked with representing the constituents of Edmonton-Rutherford through my constituency office. I would like to introduce Stacey Wickman. Yes, she is the daughter-in-law of my mentor and the former member of this Assembly, Percy Wickman, and she is my constituency manager. With her today is Caitlin Scruggs, who is my STEP student, my summer student, this year. I would ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three members of the Home-based Learning Society of Alberta, HLSA. It is a nonprofit society which provides information and support to families that have children learning at home and in the community. I met with these three representatives earlier today together with my colleague from St. Albert, and we appreciate their time and effort. The first person, who is an Edmonton-McClung constituent and the one who co-ordinated this gathering of home-

schoolers, is Louisa Lawson. She is joined by Joseph Mann, the president of HLSA, and Wendy Sauvé, who is their government relations officer. These three who are here now and about 50 more people who are going to join us in the public gallery in about 15 minutes are all opposed to the proposed standardized testing provisions in the latest draft of the Alberta home education regulation. This delegation comes from approximately 18 or 19 families from in and around Edmonton, and not all of them are members of the HLSA. I would now ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Government Contracting Policies

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A small look into government contracting policies reveals a big problem with the way this government hands out taxpayer dollars. Contracts are awarded without proper tendering, and little to no work seems to be required for consultants to cash their cheques. However, this government feels that this is normal conduct for everyday business. My questions are to the Premier. Given that this government shrugs off Rod Love's verbal advice contracts as the regular course of business, can the Premier provide the Assembly with other examples where contracts were given out for verbal advice and there was no documentation?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, in the preamble the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition says "shrugs off." That is wrong. I don't shrug off anything. I don't pay particular attention to those contracts that are led by agencies of the government. Now, if it involves my office and there is a contract let, then I certainly wouldn't shrug anything off. I would pay very special attention to it.

In the case of Rod Love I understand that what the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition alludes to is a contract with the Calgary regional health authority. Now, that authority is appointed by the government, and it's a hands-off, self-governing body that is entirely independent. They hire, like the other eight health regions, who they want to hire and put on contract.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Premier: will the Premier commit to directing his ministers to find similar contracts for verbal advice and table them in the Legislature as soon as next week if possible?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to . . .

Dr. Taft: Don't shrug it off.

Mr. Klein: I'm not shrugging anything off.

My ministers are very talented and smart individuals, very talented and very smart individuals who are quite capable of hiring who they want or firing who they want, and I quite frankly don't involve myself unless something is so untoward and so wrong that it requires my attention. Otherwise, I will let these very smart and talented people decide for themselves, unlike the Leader of the Opposition, who wants control, control, control.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, let's try the Minister of Finance. Maybe we'll get different – given that the Minister of Finance has in fact recently changed the way her department hands out government contracts, will she recommend that other departments and regional health authorities take similar actions to avoid contracts like those given out to Rod Love and Kelley Charlebois?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that all departments have reviewed their contracting policy and all of them have implemented a policy that would withstand scrutiny. Of course, a lot of those changes were made on the good advice of our Auditor General, whose advice we take seriously and follow very carefully.

At this point in time the RHAs, as the Premier has indicated, are an independent authority. They are funded by us. They present a business plan and a budget to the minister of health, which she approves. I would say that over 80 per cent of our RHAs – the minister of health could give you the exact number – in fact are audited by the Auditor General. I think that there are three exceptions, and they are audited by a recognized auditor. If there are any issues in those areas, I am sure that the Auditor General would bring them to our attention.

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

Automobile Insurance Rate Board Expenditures

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In May of last year members of the Automobile Insurance Rate Board and a few top Department of Finance officials dined at a posh Edmonton restaurant. An access to information request shows only a credit card receipt for \$914 and absolutely no breakdown of expenses. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. Given that the average price of an entrée at this restaurant was \$27, can the minister please tell all Albertans how it was possible for 12 people to spend over \$900?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Automobile Insurance Rate Board is a delegated authority of the province of Alberta. If there is a question on a meal expenditure, which I expect was a meeting and a meal, certainly I'll undertake to the hon. member to raise it with the chair of the Automobile Insurance Rate Board.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to guess that Albertans are going to find the bill for this meal hard to swallow.

Can the minister please tell us how much of the \$914 was spent on alcohol?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know. I wouldn't have any insight into that. I would undertake, as I did in my earlier answer to the hon. member, to raise this issue with the Automobile Insurance Rate Board chair. Perhaps he will provide some insight. There is certainly a hosting policy in all of these areas that I am responsible for. If there's a concern that they have not stayed within that hosting policy, I've indicated that I'll raise it with the chair.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is for the Minister of Restructuring and Government Efficiency. Can the

minister please tell us anything at all about the efficiency of meetings conducted in restaurants while the participants are consuming alcohol?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea whatsoever what kind of meetings he's talking about, whether somebody's consuming alcohol or not consuming alcohol. I believe that if you were hosting a group from out of province or whatever and they wanted a glass of wine with their meal, I don't think that anybody would mind that whatsoever.

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

Hospital Bed Capacity

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Liberal opposition has received charts from emergency room physicians in the Capital health region showing that at 8 a.m. on May 3 there were only two medical beds available in the entire health region of a million people and 71 people, having cleared emergency rooms, waiting for beds. A study released yesterday by the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health confirms that emergency room overcrowding is reaching critical levels. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that emergency rooms are operating at full capacity, what plans does the minister have in place to deal with an emergency like a bus crash or a flu outbreak or a catastrophe due to weather?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, first of all, since 2003 we have had in place a plan for catastrophes, like a pandemic plan, like plans that would help us initiate a protocol and backup supports. In fact, there are even interprovincial plans that have been supportive since the time of SARS, when on a daily basis communication was held with all of the ministers of health and their senior staff across the country. Fortunately, this week I will attend yet another federal/provincial/territorial meeting on pandemic planning. So in terms of major catastrophic events that impact the health system, I believe that we are more advanced simply because the Canadian government recognized that Alberta should be the one that would be presenting relative to cross-ministry approaches to planning. So while we review with significant concern limited bed capacity in regions, I can assure Albertans and the hon. member opposite that we've done a lot of work to make sure that in catastrophic situations we are indeed ready.

Ms Blakeman: Mr. Speaker, back to the same minister: if there are only two beds available at a given time in the entire region, how does the minister expect to be dealing with some sort of catastrophic health emergency? There are only two beds available.

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Gerry Predy has been the medical officer of health in the Capital region, and he has organized and orchestrated a number of meetings with other providers in the regions. Throughout Alberta there is a very strong and significant network. Obviously, other facilities outside the Capital health region are available.

I'd say one more thing. Mr. Speaker, \$1.4 billion: that was the expenditure assigned last year to make sure that we were building the bed capacity to make sure that in the future we would not have the same kind of opportunity that we face today. We're faced with that opportunity today because of a heated economy that is generating a lot of people in this province, that is gathering an intense

number of people in Edmonton and the Capital region. That rapid growth has necessitated an even more rapid expansion of some of our facilities.

Mr. Speaker, may I make the point that it's not like we're not trying here.

The Speaker: We have a time factor too.

The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the increasing acuity of people using emergency rooms means that the primary care centres are not an option, what choices do these patients have?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, we have identified, as the hon. member is aware, 19 additional primary care centres there. Acuity, as described, could mean anything from the flu season, the kinds of things that had more intense pressure this year, and also looking at other community-based facilities to offer other kinds of supports. There is certainly a plan to use the region for those regions that have additional pressure. That regional expansion has seen day surgeries done in Westlock, in Barrhead, in other outlying communities, in Lamont, in Fort Saskatchewan.

Ultimately, I'm confident that the peaks and valleys that we are experiencing today will level out and that there is, indeed, a good, managed system and that they are making the best of what sometimes is a very tight situation.

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

Anticrime Volunteer Groups

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, a U.S.-based group called the Guardian Angels wants to set up shop in Edmonton and Calgary. This group is widely known for its vigilante approach. Their confrontational approaches put citizens at risk, and many responsible municipal and police leaders have opposed the establishment of Guardian Angel chapters in their city. To the Solicitor General: why is this minister in his public statements seeming to endorse the attempts of the Guardian Angels to set up shop in Edmonton and Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not endorsing this group as a whole. I am endorsing the fact that every member of the public has a responsibility to be vigilant, not vigilante.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about crime prevention programs such as Block Watch and apartment watch and radio watch, these are all programs where the police service liaises with community organizations and volunteer groups. If the Guardian Angels enter into an agreement with the Calgary Police Service or the Edmonton Police Service, I would think that there could be a relationship there, and it may be a possibility for them to work in that community. But those, again, are discussions that have to take place at the community level.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Why hasn't this minister been vigilant in ensuring that there's adequate funding for

our police services, including up to 500 officers, which the NDP opposition has been proposing? Why hasn't this minister been vigilant in ensuring that we have enough police resources so that we don't need the Guardian Angels and their vigilante tactics?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, the budget for policing in the province, including the provincial funding that's provided, is about \$700 million a year for municipal policing and the RCMP throughout Alberta. We've provided 200 front-line officers to policing in the last two years alone.

Mr. Eggen: That's from attrition.

Mr. Cenaiko: That's in addition to attrition and not counting the positions we looked at in our organized crime strategies, in ICE, the integrated child exploitation positions. So we've added a number, and we're going to continue to look at those numbers. Again, we've added a component of sheriffs that are going to be working on our highways, which will be able to replace RCMP officer positions and allow them to do criminal investigations, respond to emergencies, and let sheriffs do traffic enforcement. So there are a number of initiatives. We want to look at new models of policing service delivery throughout Alberta so that we can effectively use our police officers to the best advantage possible.

Mr. Mason: To the same minister: given that the lack of provincial funding forced the closure of the duplex run by Crossroads street outreach housing for street-involved youth and given that there's a shortage of low-income housing, that there's a shortage of funding for drug rehabilitation, that there's a shortage for all kinds of things that could help prevent crime, what has this minister done to be vigilant in terms of making sure that municipalities have the tools and the financing that they need to prevent crime from starting in the first place?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, the hon. member mentions a number of issues that are related to policing. On the social issues we have a number of ministries within this government that are providing funds to agencies, to organizations to provide for those. As the Premier has mentioned over and over and over, we're there to provide them with a hand up and not a handout.

In policing, Mr. Speaker, crime prevention programs are in place. We do provide the city of Edmonton with over \$12 million, not counting the \$27 million they get to keep from their fine revenue, not counting the millions of dollars they get from our ministry of infrastructure regarding infrastructure funding for police buildings. So, obviously, we're talking not the \$11 million or \$12 million that goes in a grant cheque but, really, an opportunity for the municipality of Edmonton to look at somewhere around \$40 million. In Calgary it's around \$57 million, not the \$15 million cheque. When you add all of those components into it, these municipalities in Alberta get the highest award from any provincial government anywhere in this nation. So we have really outdone ourselves in Alberta, but we will continue to pursue new models of policing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Freedom of Choice

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning we were treated again to hear the winning essays on democracy. Master Lisiecki was grateful to wake each day with the freedom to choose who he wants to be. Mr. Warring was proud to have fought for our

democracy and our freedom to speak our mind and worship as we please. However, there are many religious leaders and churches and citizens who no longer feel that they have their freedoms of conscience, religion, and belief protected due to recent changes in federal legislation. My questions today are to the Premier. Will he restore the balance back to our democracy by passing legislation that protects religious organizations and leaders from prosecution or sanctions over their beliefs and being forced by law to go against their conscience?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I am not certain as to whether we have legislation in place, but certainly the principle has been long established, that there is freedom of speech and freedom of religious expression. I believe that legislation exists within the human rights legislation to protect all ministers of the cloth and others who wish to express their religious beliefs.

Mr. Hinman: I hope the Premier's beliefs are correct.

Again to the Premier, who has stated that he is not comfortable to perform certain legal marriages: will he sponsor legislation protecting religious leaders and marriage commissioners to choose to solemnize only those marriages which do not contradict their own religion and conscience?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that matter is up to the Legislature if they ever get around to it. There is a bill before the Legislature, a private member's bill, Bill 208, that speaks to this issue. If the hon. leader of the fourth party is interested in my personal opinion, I believe that there should be protection for marriage commissioners to not perform weddings if it violates their moral or their religious principles.

Mr. Hinman: That's why we're asking for a government bill instead of a private bill.

To the Premier again: will this government pass legislation that allows elected school boards, who represent their districts, the flexibility to choose which relationships are to be promoted or supported by the curriculum within their jurisdiction?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, this is a matter for school boards and the Minister of Education, so I'll have him respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwodzesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in fact, the Alberta School Act does have provisions already in it. We do teach on a mandatory basis courses in human sexuality from grade 4 through grade 9. In grades 10, 11, and 12, of course, the popular CALM course is taught, which is career and life management skills. However, there's also a provision there which says very clearly that if parents have any reservations or concerns or whatever, they can ask for their child to be exempted from those classes.

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

Climate Change

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is Canada's top greenhouse gas emitter, and its emissions aren't going to wait while the federal government decides if it will support or oppose the Kyoto protocol. My only question to the Minister of Environment: how is this delayed decision affecting Alberta's action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta – and I say to all of this Assembly, to all of us that actually represent our citizens, over 3 million – one thing about all of our citizens is that they don't just talk; they act. That's exactly what we are doing on climate change: we are acting. Not only that, I'm proud to say that Canada under not only the federal Liberal government but now the Conservative government is following the made-in-Alberta solution because we don't want to see money leave Canada to go to buy a hot air credit that says that you can pay to pollute. What we believe in and want to see is concrete action.

In fact, today the Minister of Energy and I were at the Shell plant at Scotford. Shell is a typical company for the actions they are taking in forward thinking relative to adapting to and managing climate change. Today it was very interesting, when they announced, of course, this new high-tech LSD, low sulphur diesel.

An Hon. Member: LSD?

Mr. Boutilier: This is LSD, and it's not the illegal drug. It is the actual technology that is being used to make a difference right here in Alberta. We continue to move forward. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans expect no less of their government. We'll continue not to talk but to act.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Home Education

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems to have lost the trust of yet another group of Albertans concerned about education. This government offers home-schooling as an option for educating some of our students, but parents from the home-schooling community are concerned that the program may no longer be administered fairly. Some home-schoolers do not study the regular curriculum or do only parts of it. To the Minister of Education: given that standardized testing is designed to assess students who study a standardized curriculum and given that home-schooled children do in fact work with teachers in their homes who act as facilitators to monitor development and guide progress, why is the minister now asking these students to write a test on something that they do not study?

2:10

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member to get better researchers on his staff because I'm not doing anything of the sort. In fact, what we have done is that the home ed regulation as it exists today has been extended through to the end of July. In the meantime, very shortly I hope to present that very community that he's asking about with what the new regulation will look like. Until we finish that process and I've had a chance to discuss it with them yet again – I've already met with them probably half a dozen times or so – I won't be commenting any much further.

Specific to the issue of standardized testing, Mr. Speaker, it typically occurs at the grade 3, 6, 9 levels. In fact, according to the rights and privileges accorded to home educators and home-educating students, they have the option to write it or not write it, as they wish.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fifty of these people are in the gallery today. Will the minister commit to meeting with them in the near future then?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I would be very pleased to meet with them. I attended their annual conference – I think it was last year – in Red Deer. We had a wonderful visit with them, and we did about a 40-minute question-and-answer period. I've met with their representatives. I've corresponded with them through e-mails and letters and phone calls and what have you dozens and dozens of times. We've had about four or five or six formal meetings with the home education community representatives. There are various groups there.

The essential thing to remember here is that home-educating parents do have the constitutional right to work with their children in their homes if they wish provided certain conditions and so on are met. We intend to continue to allow them, for the most part, as far as I'm aware anyway, to do the very same thing in the future.

Mr. Elsalhy: My last question, Mr. Speaker: can the minister explain the flip-flop between the previous Minister of Education's position and the current position that's held by the minister today?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any flip-flop whatsoever. It's quite customary to review regulations approximately every five years or so, and that's what we're in the process of doing now.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Legislative Assembly Virtual Visit Project

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, a very exciting event occurred today in the Legislature rotunda. I'm referring to the official launch of a new online project called the Virtual Visit, which uses the Internet to literally invite the world into our wonderful Alberta Legislature Building. I understand that this project is the first of its kind anywhere in the world.

Before I ask my questions, I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of Education for making this project possible. [interjections] I just read it, Mr. Speaker.

My questions are to the Minister of Education. How will this Virtual Visit online learning resource be utilized by our school system?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, one of the most valuable aspects of the Virtual Visit project is that it will allow students throughout the province, regardless of where they live, to pay a virtual visit to the Legislature without leaving their classroom. We know that this is a beautiful province, but it is also very, very distant in terms of the travel time required between places, and not every school group is allowed the opportunity to come to this beautiful building. Earlier today some school groups were introduced, and we were grateful to have them here, but not every child is afforded that particular opportunity. Therefore, the short answer is that the Virtual Visit project will allow all students that particular opportunity. It will also allow teachers to use the Virtual Visit project as a valuable learning and teaching tool in their classrooms and for students in their homes, too, if they wish.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder: could the minister enlighten us if this project will have an impact on the school curriculum, and how? [interjections]

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, there's a great amount of congruency between the Virtual Visit project and our Alberta school curriculum. I think members of the opposition who are moaning and groaning about this project should realize that this is a first for Alberta, and it's a first in the world. We should be proud of it. You shouldn't be heckling this one, opposition members.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the congruency is really manifested in the fact that this Legislature contains a lot of history, a lot of important history, be it the Famous Five individuals or be it former Premiers or Lieutenant Governors or MLAs in general or Speakers and so on. So there's a great congruency there with the curriculum, and there's also a fit even with the local history as well as with math and statistics and election results and so on. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally and apparently mercifully, my final question to the minister: could he inform us of any future plans for this project?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, well, that's a much better response. Thank you. One day you will realize how important this project is, which I realize that you're not realizing today, opposition members, because you may be part of that history. In the future we hope to have these doors opened up to the Virtual Visit, and the camera will actually take students in between our desks, and they will see where members such as some hon. members today sit.

Electricity Regulation

Mr. MacDonald: In April the Minister of Energy met with Kellan Fluckiger, the department's electricity business unit leader. It was a very important meeting for the minister. He wanted to be on his best behaviour when his real boss showed up in his office. This meeting was to discuss the government's latest blueprint on electricity deregulation, which is named role and mandate refinements for Alberta electric industry. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why is the government recommending that the Independent System Operator have the authority to approve their own expenses without any further review from the EUB?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a wonderful day to be able to meet with the many, many, many capable, talented, energetic, loyal employees of the Department of Energy. Kellan Fluckiger is one of them. We have numerous meetings. This certainly wasn't the first time this topic was ever introduced. The department is always engaging in consultations with the public about how we can improve the systems that we have in place. In this case we were reviewing the roles and mandates of the Energy and Utilities Board, the Alberta Electric System Operator, and the Market Surveillance Administrator just to make sure that among the bodies there is appropriate governance. So in this case it was just to make sure that in looking at the Alberta Electric System Operator, we have got the appropriate structure and governance with respect to their budgets, their allocation of costs, the approvals, all of those good things.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why is this government allowing Mr. Kellan Fluckiger to continue to undermine the regulatory authority of the EUB?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, that wouldn't be the case at all. In fact, if you talk to the Energy and Utilities Board and the Alberta Electric System Operator, they've been very much jointly co-operating and working on these issues so that there's no overlap and duplication among the two boards. Really, the intent of this is so that we're not missing something between the boards and that we're also not duplicating the efforts amongst the two boards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Energy: why are electricity generators writing the rules for the Market Surveillance Administrator in this latest attempt to force more costs onto the power bills of Alberta consumers?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Market Surveillance Administrator has been very proactive in working to ensure, as their role is, that the public is protected and enforcement is there in case any irregularities or any problems do occur that would be unwarranted. So they do act as a great enforcement agency on behalf of all Albertans, to protect them. That said, we always are open to consulting with industry and the public at large, so we will always encourage that we get the best feedback on how to make sure that this is a very strong regulatory structure.

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

Postsecondary Education in Public Health

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge signed a memorandum of agreement to align their efforts in advancing public health in Alberta. This collaborative agreement follows the announcement last month of the University of Alberta School of Public Health, Canada's first stand-alone facility dedicated to public health. My first question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister outline how her department plans to support this initiative, and would that include any financial support?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it was an exciting morning this morning with health care providers and educators packed into a room at the university, at the Telus building, with Calgary president Harvey Weingarten seated beside me, and in Lethbridge with president Bill Cade. The Lethbridge campus was linked in one virtual celebration of the first ever in Canada School of Public Health. The remarkable part about this is that instead of one place, three places across Alberta will be delivering better supports for public health.

What we will do as the Department of Health and Wellness through our officials in the public health division is look at practicum experiences, look at ways that we can support practical research. I spoke about two months ago to one of the organizers of this project, Dr. David Low in Calgary, and while there were no

identified dollars for this initiative at this time, it's understood that the collaboration between the campuses, between the government departments that could participate will ultimately see a number of dollars presented to us. There was an estimate that the University of Alberta may be in need of some \$20 million to support some of their programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is for the Minister of Advanced Education. Why is this important work being shared among three universities rather than having it concentrated at one university where it could become a public health care centre of excellence?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, let me say that it's a great day for postsecondary education and wellness in the province of Alberta. In many cases it does make sense to have a university specialize and become a centre of excellence. We have many examples of that. For example, the University of Lethbridge and water. They specialize in that.

But public health is a very broad and complex issue that involves many disciplines, so it makes sense to share that vast field amongst our institutions. Plus, each university currently specializes in a particular area, and it's important to link those together. For example, the new Alberta School of Public Health at the University of Alberta offers highly specialized education and training to Albertans pursuing careers in this field and to those already working in this field, but the Markin institute at the University of Calgary designs, implements, and evaluates solutions at the population level to prevent health problems, and the University of Lethbridge, Mr. Speaker – this is very important – has Canada's only baccalaureate program in addictions counselling.

The Speaker: Everything's important. I have 18 members wanting to raise questions.

The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will this announcement help attract the much-needed new researchers that we need in Alberta?

Mr. Herard: Mr. Speaker, I think I'll need more than 45 seconds for this one. I can get excited about this one. Not only is this the first in Canada, but in this province we know how to attract the brightest and the best people to come to this province to do research and bring with them the postgrads that follow them around in order to study from these masters. I'm going to be working with the minister of health and the Minister of Innovation and Science and see if we can't duplicate the success of iCORE that brought in 23 new chairs for the ICT industry. Let's see if we can do it for wellness.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Wind Power Generation

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bias of this government towards coal generation is well known. In fact, the return of Old King Coal was a major theme in this spring's throne speech. That's why I guess it should come as no surprise that the regulator agency

that controls generators to the provincial power grid has recently moved to cap wind power generation in this province. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Why are senior officials in the Department of Energy working hand in glove with the Alberta Electric System Operator to impose an artificially low cap of 900 megawatts on renewable, zero emission wind power generation in this province?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, we're delighted that the hon. member is also supportive of wind generation and the alternative. Our department is clearly supportive of that. This province has more wind generation than any other province in the country. [interjections] I haven't yet polled the whole universe, but I certainly can say that I speak for the country when I say that it has the most wind power thus far. That said, for all the wind that he would like, we're prepared to let him take this power under one condition: if he only wants wind, then he only gets electricity when the wind is blowing.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that the AESO is not proposing to cap generation from power plants burning coal and natural gas, why is the minister standing idly by while the AESO uses its regulatory authority to impose an unnecessary cap on wind power generation? Lots of other jurisdictions have a much higher cap.

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, like I said, we can have all the wind we want – we could go to a hundred per cent wind – and if the wind is not blowing, there would be no electricity in this building as we speak. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor. The chair is very attentive to his answer.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you. With respect to this, some of the jurisdictions – and I might use Quebec in particular – are actually going out and actively trying to bring on a lot more wind, in fact a very substantial amount of wind power. But they have a very great quantity of hydro. If you've got a large quantity of hydro, it's easy to ramp up the need for new electricity coming on if you've got hydro against wind. Whereas Alberta is very more constrained in the quantity of hydro that we have. You've got to balance the kinds of sources of electricity so that it's reliable, predictably delivered when we want it. Every time we go to that light switch, we can count on the power.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that other jurisdictions like the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Quebec, as the hon. minister mentioned, are finding that 15 or more per cent of their electricity load can be met by wind power without affecting system reliability, why is this government allowing the AESO to restrict wind power generation to less than 10 per cent of Alberta's electricity load when certainly it could be approaching double that?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, AESO, first off, said that they wanted to manage above a certain amount. They didn't say that there was a cap they couldn't go beyond. They said that if you're going to add a great supply of wind, you have to appropriately manage. How does that factor into the other reliable sources of electricity so that it can come when wind isn't blowing? Now, if they want to blow a lot more, I guess we'll have more reliable wind power.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Highway Maintenance Contracts

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1995-96 the government of Alberta privatized Alberta's highway maintenance contracts. At that time the cost of Alberta highway maintenance was approximately \$72 million. This year the government is expecting to pay \$234 million in highway maintenance, a 224 per cent increase. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: given that four of seven highway maintenance contracts will expire in July 2006, what assurance can the minister provide this House that the bidding competition process will be transparently accountable rather than sole sourced?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, there is a process for bidding of contracts, and I will certainly take that question under advisement for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I guess I'll have to go to the Deputy Premier again. Given that the Auditor General found that the government has failed to properly account for the real costs of highway maintenance, compounded by constant complaints regarding the deterioration of our highways, are Albertans getting value from these contracts?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again I'll be happy to get some detail for the hon. member from the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, but I remind all hon. members of the tremendous growth that has occurred in this province in the last very short years, and for anyone who travels outside of this city on our rural roads outside any of our centres, you know that the traffic has increased in a tremendous way. I was on highway 21 last evening, a very, very busy road. That's a good sign. That means that things are happening in this province.

Are we getting good value? The minister questions that through his contracts and through the process at the end of the contract of ensuring that the work has been done. As I say, you'll get a detailed answer from the minister.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I very much appreciate the Deputy Premier researching that information and having it sent to me.

Given that former Treasurer Steve West indicated that highway maintenance privatization would save Alberta taxpayers millions but, instead, has dramatically increased costs with reduced quality, why is this government continuing down the privatization road?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, again, you have to compare apples and apples, not apples and oranges, which we usually do. One, we have an increased number of highways. Every year the age of those highways changes, and so do the rehab requirements. The traffic patterns change. The size of equipment has changed. For many of our highways the base was built 25 years ago. So to expect that you could actually have a lower maintenance cost today in Alberta's economy is impossible. Are we getting good value? That is something that the minister ensures in the contracting process. There is an expectation of value, and at the end of that contract that is reviewed; I know that for a fact. The satisfaction must be there,

or the companies are called back to redo or complete the job. Again, more detail coming from the minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Orkney Water Co-operative

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Orkney water co-op consists of nine farmers who drilled two community or co-operative wells, which were piped to their farms as well as to an old school which has been used as a community centre since it closed as a school many years ago. This co-op was operated successfully for many years until recently when they were told by environmental officials that they had to have a qualified water technician on staff to test their water daily and will be treated the same as a hamlet. This will drive their costs up significantly. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister assure me that the Orkney water co-op is being treated exactly the same as the numerous communal farms that are located throughout the province?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, ensuring safe, secure drinking water to all Albertans: yes, I can assure the hon. member of that. In the particular example Alberta Environment, of course, is looking for some very practical solutions for keeping costs down, but as you can appreciate, any time there's a communal hall where not just necessarily the farmers from the area that you talk about but the general public come to an area where, in fact, they would go in expecting clean, safe drinking water, we have to ensure that. It's my understanding that that's happening as we speak. We want to minimize it. We're trying to take very practical, common-sense approaches to ensure safe drinking water. At the same time, when someone comes to visit someone, they will also be assured in that visit that they have safe drinking water as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that other communal farms also have a church or a school building that also doubles as a community centre for such occasions as weddings, funerals, and Christmas concerts that have invited guests from the public there, can you tell me what the difference is between these community centres and the Orkney community centre?

Mr. Boutilier: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there is any difference. Ultimately, the fact is that we want to achieve safe drinking water. I can say that from my former ministry I am very familiar with the financial obstacles that smaller communities face. Safe drinking water is an expectation of all Albertans. From a big city like Calgary or Edmonton to a small rural community we want to ensure safe drinking water.

I also am not suggesting that the best solution for these farmers is just simply a whole additional expense. I think we can find creative ways of getting safe drinking water without the bureaucracy of instilling unnecessary costs, and I can assure the hon. member that we will not instill any unnecessary costs in ensuring that safe drinking water.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Marz: Thank you. Again to the same minister: so when can the Orkney water co-op be advised that they will be treated the same as every other organization of similar circumstances such as these other communal farms?

Mr. Boutilier: Well, Mr. Speaker, our Water for Life strategy is a fine example of ensuring safe drinking water. I also want to say: did you know that over 600,000 Albertans rely on water from private wells? Of course, as much as they have managed those private wells on their own, which are unregistered, we still have a responsibility to ensure their safe drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that we are working very closely with the hon. member. I appreciate also his advance notice of this important issue to try to alleviate in a creative but responsible way safe, secure drinking water for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wild Rose Foundation Granting Process

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While attending a fundraiser in my constituency to build a school for Sudan this past weekend, I was shocked to hear the Tory MLA for Calgary-East boldly declare that the Wild Rose Foundation would match all monies raised that evening. Despite the fact that the group had not yet applied for a Wild Rose grant, the member's promise implied that he had direct control over the granting process. This raises serious questions about the policy of this government and the impartiality of the Wild Rose Foundation granting process. To the Minister of Community Development: is it the policy of this government to allow Tory MLAs to use the Wild Rose Foundation as their own political fund for garnering support?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any improper action taking place by the board members of the Wild Rose Foundation, so I find that a very big discredit that we're accusing those people and the good work they do on behalf of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's about the MLA for Calgary-East.

To the minister again: given that the Member for Calgary-East has already made the monetary promise and the group believed him, will the minister be requiring the Wild Rose Foundation to honour his commitment?

Mr. Ducharme: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any such request. All requests that go to the Wild Rose Foundation are vetted by good Albertans that sit on there as members, and they review all of these depending on their merit. I'm not aware of any MLA involvement from the time that I've served in this Chamber that they'd dictate to the board who shall receive any funding.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Community Development: what consequences, if any, will the Member for Calgary-East face as a result of this bypassing of the formal process for acquiring a Wild Rose grant? I'll provide the information to the minister.

Speaker's Ruling Allegations against a Member

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View almost seems, from the perception of the Speaker, to be making an accusation against another member of this House. There is a policy and

there is a procedure in the Standing Orders to deal with this. So we're going to leave this matter. The hon. Member for Calgary-East will be advised that these questions were raised in the House. The hon. Member for Calgary-East may choose to take certain actions under the Standing Orders with respect to this, and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View will also be given an opportunity, and we'll see where it all goes.

Before we deal with Members' Statements, I'm going to invite the hon. Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance to supplement a question from the question period yesterday. I believe the question that the hon. member was responding to was originated by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, so under our procedures the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford will have an opportunity to raise an additional question.

Government Liabilities

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, this is in regard to a question that was raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford yesterday. The quote from *Hansard* is: "The government's liabilities have grown by nearly \$3 billion in the last year." He cited information on page 43 of the fiscal plan. In fact, total government liabilities are forecast to have declined from March 31, '05-06, by \$760 million. That's a forecast. The final numbers will be available in June as part of our government's final business plan. There is a forecast increase – and again it's a forecast – to March 31, '07, which is about \$500 million.

As I said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, it was unclear from the member's three questions whether he was referring to pension liabilities or other things. In fact, this forecast that I'm speaking to is as a result of lending through Crown agencies, Agriculture Financial Services and Alberta corporate finance.

2:40

It appears that the hon. member has misread the fiscal financial assets line, which in fact shows an increase of nearly \$3 billion in assets rather than liabilities. So I thought it was important, Mr. Speaker, that we have it on the record. Certainly, the hon. member and I can have a further discussion on this, but I would suggest that he has misread the fiscal financial statements.*

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

Mr. R. Miller: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It would appear to me that there is some discrepancy between the minister's understanding of my questions and the way they were meant. Since I'm allowed a question, I guess my question for the minister would be this: how would the minister explain the discrepancy, then, between the graph that is in this year's fiscal plan versus the graph that is in last year's fiscal plan, which does in fact show an increase of \$3 billion in the province's total liability? That was the question yesterday.

Mrs. McClellan: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that he's misreading the financial statements. I would be happy to sit down with the hon. member and review them. I've had the staff at the office of budget management, which I can assure you are pretty diligent and learned people, go over this thoroughly to ensure that, in fact, we did have an increase in assets of \$3 billion rather than an increase of liabilities. So we can have that conversation. As I indicated yesterday, we'll have two hours tonight to discuss it as well as generally accepted accounting principles, which is how our financial statements are presented.

*See p. 1401, left col., para. 7

Vignettes from the Assembly's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll call upon six hon. members today to participate in Members' Statements, but first of all the historical vignette for the day. Twice in the same week it deals with the making of history rather than dealing with history.

Citizens' access to the Legislature Building and citizens' understanding of the building and the institution of democracy that it houses has taken decades to develop. Alberta did not start producing its own *Hansard* until 1972, making Alberta one of the last provinces in Canada to do so. Alberta, however, was one of the first jurisdictions in the country to have permanent television broadcasts, with the first of its proceedings televised on March 15, 1972. In 1998 a searchable *Hansard* was provided daily on the Internet, and in 2003 gavel-to-gavel audio broadcasts were added to the Assembly website, followed in 2004 by streamed video of Oral Question Period.

On July 1, 1998, unique in Canada and for the first time in the history of Alberta opportunity was accorded to citizens to walk onto the floor of this Chamber. We now have numerous student parliaments, upwards of eight, a School at the Legislature five days a week, and some 176,000 visitors annually come to this building, where they're met by talented and professional tour guides who make them feel very comfortable.

While we are pleased with the many people who do visit and can visit this building, many were unable to visit the Legislature Building until now. Today, as you've already heard, we've unveiled the most innovative access visitor tool found anywhere in the world. The Virtual Visit: Step Inside the Alberta Legislature website is another major educational first for Alberta. To the knowledge of many, no other online tour provides the same immersive, 3-D experience that Alberta's tour does.

This project, Virtual Visit: Step Inside the Alberta Legislature, provides a realistic three-dimensional environment in cyberspace that replicates the layout, scale, lighting, and finishes of the Alberta Legislature. Students and citizens anywhere in the world can access the website and experience a virtual tour of this building that allows them to look around and move as if in the real world.

As Speaker I would very much like to extend deepest appreciation to Alberta Education, the previous minister, and the current minister for believing in a project that had humble beginnings several years ago. Virtual Visit: Step Inside the Alberta Legislature was fully funded as an Alberta Education centennial project, and gifted people in Alberta Education worked hand in hand with gifted people in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to erect a groundbreaking education visitors' tool that is the first of its kind. Deepest appreciation is also extended to the private sector firm Fuel Industries for outstanding work on this project.

Access is at www.virtualvisit.learnalberta.ca.

Today's tour is the first step. With the support of the members of this Assembly we hope to add more educational activities as well as enhanced interactive features with Members of this Legislative Assembly in the future. As of today anyone anywhere in the world can visit the Alberta Legislature Building right now as we speak.

head:

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Biodiesel Fuel

Mr. Stelmach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has the opportunity to take the lead in renewable fuels and be the green transportation and energy leader across Canada. By leveraging off the

agriculture and petroleum industries, we can revitalize rural Alberta and improve the environment for all Canadians.

Alberta farmers have much to gain from a strong canola-based biodiesel industry. A renewable fuel standard of 5 per cent would require roughly 2.87 million tonnes of oilseed. Last year Alberta farmers harvested approximately 3.6 million tonnes. Alberta farmers with high-quality soil, leading canola yields, and proximity to Canada's petroleum production and distribution sectors for downstream blending would be well positioned to provide the primary feedstock for a strong domestic biodiesel industry.

Stringent standards must be supported. Canola is considered to be the best biodiesel feedstock for cold weather use.

Mr. Speaker, biodiesel widespread use will benefit the health of all Albertans. It will lower air pollutants like sulphur, carbon monoxide, unburned hydrocarbon, and particulate matter. With a 5 per cent standard we will reduce CO₂ emissions by 3.3 megatonnes per year. Each litre of biodiesel reduces carbon dioxide by approximately 78 per cent compared with normal diesel.

Mr. Speaker, a renewable field industry will develop a more sustainable rural economy, deliver health care benefits from improved air quality, and lower harmful greenhouse gases.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Big Valley Jamboree

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over a decade the Big Valley Jamboree of Camrose has been one of the largest country music festivals in Canada. It's also been one of the most highly regarded. In two out of the past five years the Big Valley Jamboree has been recognized as the country music event of the year by the Canadian Country Music Association.

However, you don't need to see industry awards to know that this event is very highly regarded. The success of the Big Valley Jamboree is very apparent when you see the more than 85,000 people who attend this weekend each year that it's held. For four days in August a new village springs up around the Camrose Exhibition Grounds, covering a 400-acre area.

The jamboree has something for everyone, including a trade fair, cattle penning, and songwriting workshops. There are family-specific events and campsites as well as events and camping venues which are more geared towards adults.

The artists who perform at Big Valley have always been as diverse as the crowds which attend this festival, and this year is no different. This year the main stage will play host to headliners such as Gretchen Wilson, Montgomery Gentry, Mel Tillis, and Alberta's own Terri Clark among many other excellent performers.

As with so many other large events the success of the Big Valley Jamboree is largely dependent on the hundreds of volunteers who work so diligently to ensure that the festival goes and performers alike enjoy this great music weekend.

On behalf of the constituents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose I would like to invite all members of this Legislature and all Albertans to experience the Big Valley Jamboree this August 3 to 6 in Camrose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Salute to Second World War Veterans

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, last Monday marked the 61st anniversary of Victory in Europe, or VE, Day. It's an appropriate time to recognize the contributions of all of our veterans.

Approximately 1.1 million Canadians and Newfoundlanders served in the armed forces during the Second World War, including 600,000 in the Canadian army, 106,000 in the Royal Canadian Navy,

and over 200,000 in the Royal Canadian Air Force, of which my father, Pilot Officer Allan Brown, was one.

Often overlooked was the important involvement and contributions of Canadian women in the war effort. During World War II more than 45,000 Canadian women served in the military services. The women's division of the Royal Canadian Air Force was authorized in July 1941 and by 1945 had enlisted 17,000 women.

In August of 1941 the establishment of the Canadian Women's Army Corps was announced, and training bases were established in Ste.-Anne-de-Bellevue, Quebec; Kitchener, Ontario; and here in Vermilion, Alberta. More than 21,000 women served in the corps during the Second World War.

The Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, or Wrens, began recruiting in 1942 and announced 7,126 recruits by the end of the Second World War. One of those Wrens serving on the west coast of Canada was my mother, Irene Shaw, of Midnapore, Alberta, of whom I'm especially proud.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of women left the home to run farms or businesses or to take up tools or trades and work, which supported the Canadian war machine, freeing others to enlist on the front lines.

Mr. Speaker, I know that all hon. members join with me in saluting and giving thanks for all those Canadian men and women who served their country so well in time of war.

Lethbridge Centennial

Ms Pastoor: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the great pleasure of attending the official centennial ceremonies for the incorporation of Lethbridge, a grand and wonderful city. A number of dignitaries celebrated with us. They represented our twin and friendship cities from Japan, China, Montana, and Quebec. Lethbridge's own Alberta Senator Joyce Fairbairn also attended. We were entertained by the St. Patrick's fine arts school choir, the Okinawa children's choir, and the internationally recognized aboriginal hoop dancer J.J. First Charger.

The range of people and the variety of languages showed off the diversity of our outstanding city. Lethbridge welcomes newcomers from almost every country in the world. The special relationships with the Chinese and Japanese communities was highlighted in the ceremony, as was the special relationship that Lethbridge has with the aboriginal people who live in and near our city.

Mr. Speaker, Mayor Tarleck made a special announcement that our city's tax-supported debt has been retired due to the vision of the mayors and councils from 1989 onward. Former Mayor David Carpenter was on hand for the special presentation of the cancelled debentures.

The centennial theme of Rediscover Lethbridge is a call to rediscover the history of Lethbridge and its citizens. Lethbridge's history is a strong one, built on coal mining, agriculture, and a knowledge-based economy.

Lethbridge also boasts the newly reopened Galt Museum, which promises to be a pre-eminent museum in Alberta. I would like to recognize Legacy Ridge housing development, a first in Canada, which celebrates Lethbridge's historical women by naming all of the streets in their honour.

I encourage all members of this House to follow highway 2 south to the magnificent coulees of Lethbridge, where people smile and say good morning and you can park downtown for a quarter. The Mayor of Lethbridge, Bob Tarleck, has graciously provided Lethbridge centennial pins for all of the members.

I was honoured to have been a part of the centennial events, and I am sure that Clint Dunford, the MLA from Lethbridge-West,

would echo my sentiments if he were able to be with us today. Lethbridge is a rare jewel in the Alberta crown.

The Speaker: Are you happy now?

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you.

The Speaker: You went beyond the time. You mentioned a member by name. But because it's a happy occasion, a 100th anniversary, and you gave everybody a pin, maybe forgiveness is in the air.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Northgate Lions Senior Citizens' Recreation Centre

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Edmonton Northgate Lions seniors' centre is truly the best seniors' centre in all of Canada. It is not only because of the wonderful facilities that have been built up through countless hours of fundraising and tireless volunteer work; it is not only the support from communities and all the citizens of northeast Edmonton; it is mainly because there are so many great people involved as volunteers, as staff, and as active participants in the programs created and provided.

The Northgate Lions Choralaires are justly famous for their wonderfully choreographed, performed, and sung choral music productions, and they're fun. The talented instructors and group leaders in programs that range from lapidary, weaving, fine woodworking, or all sorts of painting and art and many, many other areas challenge and involve the many participants. They're interesting and they're fun.

The food is scrumptious, and it is the camaraderie in the restaurant that is always great. Some of the best snooker and pool players in town ply their skills in the poolroom. It's good fun.

Begun as a project by the Edmonton Northgate Lions Club and first constructed in 1978, the Lions have continued with their generous volunteer support for the facility as it has grown. Thank you, Lions.

The community services department of the city of Edmonton maintains the operation of the centre in collaboration with the Northgate Senior Citizens Association. This incredible seniors' organization provided over 50,000 volunteer hours to the centre and the community in 2005. Over 400 volunteers give their time freely to help with the many projects and programs. These many volunteers have also raised millions of dollars to further expand and improve the centre.

The exceptional staff, the great volunteers from the Northgate Senior Citizens Association, and Edmonton Northgate Lions must all be congratulated for their contribution. Northgate Lions seniors' centre is a tremendous contributor to the communities of northeast Edmonton and, indeed, all of Alberta. This tremendous seniors' centre is a model for all of Canada to aspire to, and it's fun.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Evans Consoles

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about an Alberta company that plays an important role in the world-famous space program. We all know of the fantastic space shuttle launching flights and the amazing human achievements in the orbiting space station.

The space shuttle vehicle has over 2 and a half million parts, and each shuttle orbiter weighs approximately 78 tonnes. The three

space shuttle main engines generate about 37 million horsepower and release the equivalent of about 23 of the largest hydroelectric dams. The solid rocket booster produces an equivalent of more than 15 million horsepower, roughly about 64,000 Corvette cars. In seven seconds the 2,000-tonne shuttle goes from a standing start to a travelling speed of 150 kilometres an hour. To monitor and control such an operation requires unimaginable efforts of human minds and equipment.

Mr. Speaker, early this month a company called Evans Consoles in Calgary became the first ever Canadian company to win the much-coveted aerospace supplier award from NASA's United Space Alliance. I had the great pleasure to join in the celebration with the executives from the NASA space program presenting the award to Evans Consoles.

Evans Consoles company received the exclusive space flight awareness supplier award for its longstanding partnership and most recently for the turnkey design, manufacture, and installation of custom consoles for the new firing room No. 4 at the Kennedy Space Centre. From this very room NASA will be launching all remaining space shuttle missions.

I would like to ask all members to join me in congratulating Evans Consoles on this fantastic award.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition signed by the students and staff from the J.T. Foster school of Nanton, who petition the Legislative Assembly to "urge the Government of Alberta to introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the substantial increase in teenage smoking."

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the same kind of petition.

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

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two petitions in the House today, one with 94 signatures and one with 95. Both petitions ask that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Alberta to "introduce legislation allowing parents the authority to place their children into mandatory drug treatment and to fund urgently required youth drug treatment centres."

Thank you.

3:00

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Associate Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation I would like to table a petition from 15 Albertans from Lethbridge and Coaldale asking the government to "introduce effective and immediate measures to curtail the . . . increase in teenage smoking."

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first tabling is copies of a letter that we

discussed in Committee of the Whole last night regarding Bill 38, the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act. This letter is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development from the Canadian Bankers Association.

My two other tablings are documents in reference to my questions earlier today in question period. The first is a letter. The original is signed by Mr. Kellan Fluckiger, and it's dated April 28, 2006. It's regarding the roles and mandates of implementing agencies, the Electric Utilities Act Advisory Committee members.

This last tabling is the roles and mandates refinements for Alberta electricity industry implementing agencies. I would ask all hon. members to have a look at this before we get on with the debate on Bill 39, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, which was introduced in this Assembly yesterday.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a campaign that was launched yesterday by Public Interest Alberta entitled Alberta's Seniors Deserve Better: It's time to take action! There's quite a thorough booklet of information and charts and facts here, and there's also a tear-off postcard on the back which people are expected to fill out and send back to our very own minister responsible for Seniors and Community Development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to table a copy of a letter that was shared with me by an Edmonton-McClung constituent, Kathie Landry, dated March 23 which she sent to the EMS department and the two ward 1 councillors detailing how long she had to wait for an ambulance and how the situation happens almost daily now that the emergency rooms are overbooked. She shared some pictures of her injuries with us, and although they might not be too clear, I promised to table them nevertheless.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to table the appropriate number of copies of the program from this afternoon's Salvation Army annual luncheon, which several members of this Assembly attended. The Minister of Municipal Affairs brought greetings on behalf of the province, and the guest speaker was Major Cedric Hills from London, England, who is the international emergency services co-ordinator. He shared with us some stories from some of the recent work that the emergency disaster services branch has completed, including working with Hurricane Katrina victims in 2005, the southern Alberta floods in 2005, the 2004 tsunami, of course, wildfires that ravaged Alberta and B.C. in 2002, and in 2001 following the terrorist attack in New York. I'm happy to have been there and happy to table these on behalf of the Salvation Army.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today 10 letters that I've received from concerned staff and citizens requesting that the government keep their promises and provide additional funding for long-term care and seniors facilities to improve living conditions

and staffing conditions. These letters are signed by Raminder Gill, Carlene Lewis, A.M. Rennie, Marilyn Slemko, Mary Pasula, S.M. and N.L. Tomlinson, E. Hope Pennock, Denise Ryan, Herta Duncan, and James New.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2006-07**

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

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

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, it's my pleasure to move Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's business plan for '06-09 and our budget estimates for '06-07.

I can hardly believe that this is Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's sixth business plan, and I've worked on all of them. Imagine that. I'm really old.

Before I begin, however, Mr. Chairman, I would like to recognize departmental staff who were instrumental in assisting me to complete this budget and make every attempt to make sure that I walk the straight and narrow. I ask that they stand as I introduce them: my deputy minister, Shelley Ewart-Johnson; assistant deputy minister Neil Reddekopp; assistant deputy minister Donavon Young; executive directors John McDonough and Bill Werry; senior financial officer Lorne Harvey – I share him with IIR – directors Jason Garipey and Gerry Kushlyk; and of course, our NADC executive director, Dan Dibbelt. I think he's there somewhere. As well, the chair of NADC has been a really fantastic individual to help us along as we develop this budget. He will be speaking on NADC's activities. I'll be asking him to do that.

I'm going to use a different approach this afternoon to provide as much time for members to ask questions if we can. Is that okay with you? Okay. If that's okay, I'll do that. I will do this by quickly highlighting achievements and reviewing the estimates and, of course, indicating why you should support the new funding in the two key areas. I will also list our strategic priorities and what we'd like to achieve.

While we are a small department, we consider ourselves to be a strategic and influential ministry with major responsibilities. We focus on policy development, not program delivery. We co-ordinate and facilitate cross-ministry policies within government, the strategies, initiatives on how to work more effectively with aboriginal governments and communities. The 2006-2007 estimates reflect our mandate to enhance aboriginal well-being and self-reliance. This population is one of the youngest and fastest growing in the province. It focuses our efforts to advance the economic and social development of Northern Alberta, the largest region in the province with over 150 communities and 60 per cent of the province's land mass yet only 10 per cent of the population. We do all this through partnerships with aboriginal people, communities, organizations, the private sector, and all levels of government.

I'd like to share our major achievements since the last estimates. Consultation received approximately \$5 million in funding last year. During that time we approved the government of Alberta's First Nations consultation policy on land management and resource development, a first across the country. We have 15 First Nations

communities and organizations that have established a one-window approach to manage resource development. Through the First Nations consultation capacity funding program we are enhancing their capacity to participate in consultation. This includes assistance in dealing with proposals and training people to manage consultation initiatives.

Traditional use studies. These are studies which are significant for First Nations, and of course what they do is map sites of cultural, spiritual, and historical significance by using a combination of documentary records and traditional knowledge of the elders of those communities. We've been very successful gathering and preserving traditional use information. As an example, 29 studies are under way involving 39 aboriginal communities. We also have 16 data-sharing agreements that have been signed with 24 aboriginal communities, and numerous traditional sites – grave sites, ceremonial areas – have been shared with government and placed under some form of protective designation. We've established positive relations with First Nations and demonstrated good faith on behalf of the Alberta Crown.

The other part is the First Nations economic participation initiative. It was designed to increase economic expertise in First Nations so they are job ready or prepared for industry partnerships. There are a growing number of First Nation leaders who recognize that economic development offers the best opportunity to enhance quality of life and self-sufficiency. They were part of the development consultation because we need to make sure that First Nations and industry are part of that.

3:10

Also, I want to say a special thank you to my Industry Advisory Committee – they have provided me with guidance as we move through this process – and, of course, the elders aboriginal advisory committee, who have also provided us with guidance as we move in this direction.

FNEPI was provided with \$2.75 million last year, including funds to our partnering ministries of Human Resources and Employment and Economic Development. As an example, 11 industry-driven partnerships have been established with First Nations in areas as diverse as oil and gas, pulp and paper, health, and environment with First Nations communities because these communities were prepared to take advantage of the economic activities surrounding their area.

On the northern development part of my portfolio, Mr. Chairman, relationships and partnerships with stakeholders in Alberta and beyond are another initiative that we take seriously. We have the responsibility of realizing the MOU, or the memorandum of understanding, with the Northwest Territories that focuses on training and employment, economic development, such as the Mackenzie pipeline, tourism, transportation, and land management. We've had a lot of results, and we look forward to moving more initiatives forward with the Territories.

We are also participants on the Alberta-Alaska Bilateral Council, which advances co-operation in energy, aboriginal issues, and, of course, labour and training. We recently travelled to Alaska to determine specific projects, how we can achieve the outcomes and determine structure.

The northern development ministers' forum is a vital part of our northern involvement. We undertake joint projects on social, economic, and fiscal issues that are important to the north. We currently lead two projects. One is developing a northern awareness strategy, and the second one is development of a communications plan.

Alberta is vice-chair for North America on the Northern Forum, which is an international organization comprised of eight northern

countries – the U.S., China, Iceland, Finland, Japan, Korea, Russia, and Canada – that are dedicated to improving the lives of northern peoples. We have also been involved with the Northern Forum for many, many years, and we're blessed to be able to make sure that we carry that specific initiative forward.

If you recall, last time I was talking about the northern development strategy. We are reassessing developing that strategy for a number of reasons. One, the rural development strategy has been now accepted by government. What we want to do is make sure that we don't duplicate our efforts but, rather, to be able to pull together all that information on how, then, northerners can take advantage of what's happening in the rural development strategy. We prefer to do that rather than build something new just for the sake of building something new. While opportunities are great, we are working on northern priorities such as improving transportation, increasing skills development, raising economic diversification, and improving access to health and education services.

Now, talking about our estimates – and I know that this is where you want to go – our 2006-2007 budget is \$44 million, up approximately \$5 million from the '05-06 forecast. We are proposing an increase of \$3.3 million, with three additional FTEs to expand and accelerate traditional use studies across the province over three years with all 47 First Nations. We need this increase because past funding was based on two assumptions. The first assumption was that the cost of TUS would be split between the government of Alberta and industry, but the courts have since established that TUS is the Crown's responsibility. Second, with current funding it would take 10 years or more to complete TUS for all Alberta First Nations. Gathering and preserving traditional use information, in our view, is at the very heart of meaningful consultation. TUS is a critical planning tool that assists industry and government in avoiding or at least reducing the impacts of development upon aboriginal and treaty rights.

Just as an example, Alexis Nakota First Nation and Millar Western Forest Products have an MOU to ensure that traditional information is considered in the forestry planning process along with the economic activities that are being explored.

We're proposing an increase of \$1.5 million, with an additional two FTEs, to support industry-based partnerships through the First Nations economic partnerships initiative. This initiative responds to a call by First Nations and industry, as I indicated in my earlier comment, to develop strategic economic partnerships and to make sure that the First Nations would be ready with their expertise within their own nations. It promotes greater collaboration and supports the development of First Nations economic development capacity at the regional and community level. Of course, this is another important tool when we're dealing with what we call self-reliance for aboriginal people.

As an example, being a small size, Kapawe'no First Nation must be innovative with its economic development approaches. A health centre has expressed interest in collaborating with the community to establish a holistic health centre that would provide services to High Prairie, Slave Lake, and the Peace River region. So those are examples of very small areas that are beginning to see what the possibilities are as long as they're able to develop their people so that they have the expertise to do that.

The total amount for Métis settlements legislative requirements and governance efforts is \$14.1 million: \$10 million is statutory funding provided to the Métis Settlements General Council as part of the Metis Settlements Accord Implementation Act, and \$4.1 million is provided to Métis settlements through the matching grants replacement agreement. This leaves approximately \$29.9 million for all departmental initiatives, including what we call aboriginal affairs,

if you look in the budget, of \$26.8 million, which includes operations of First Nations and Métis relations, land and resource issues, and of course strategic services. NADC, which my colleague will talk about: \$2.1 million. Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal: \$1 million.

In 2005-2006 the department had 90 full-time employees, of which 68 are in my department, 15 with NADC, and another seven assigned to the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. With the additional five full-time employees that we're requesting for this year, it would bring the total to 95.

Our strategic priorities in the 2006-2009 business plan continue to identify those priorities which we want to pursue. Of course, we want to make sure that consultation becomes a strong tenet of our budget, and it's self-explanatory from what I was able to explain. Building aboriginal self-sufficiency is something that we all think that we should do, but we don't quite know how to do it, so naturally we're working with the First Nations to see how we can do that. Of course, for the Métis, helping Métis settlements to prepare for the end of the statutory funding in 2007.

First Nations and Métis economic participation is something that we hear continuously, and we are making every attempt to ensure that we are involved with them.

Northern development, of course, is pretty self-explanatory. Through cross-ministry partnerships within government we want to make sure that we enhance the quality of life of aboriginal people in areas such as education, health, and employment issues.

Another core focus of the department is northern development. At this time, especially with the Northern Alberta Development Council's activities, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, the chair of the NADC, be able to give an outline of the council's activities.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It indeed gives me great pleasure to give you a presentation about the Northern Alberta Development Council. The need for the council, I would suggest, is probably greater now than it ever has been. While the opportunities are great in northern Alberta, the challenges that northern Albertans face have also increased and very much need to be addressed.

We have what I would consider inadequate transportation and infrastructure in comparison to the amount of activity that we're having and the increase in that activity that takes place particularly in the industrial areas.

3:20

We have a relatively small and sparse population. Doing business in a sparse population costs more. Doing business where the distances are so much further also provides its challenges.

We need to increase the skill levels of our population. We need to utilize the population and the contributions of all members of our population.

The challenges of being a resource-based economy are very much ones, I would say, of accessibility and the ability to access those resources. We need to work with our partners to support and further encourage value-added diversification in our regions. There is no question at this time that the oil and gas industry is the driving force of the northern economy. We need to do more to sustain our economy not only when the oil and gas prices are high but also keeping in mind when the prices fall or when they deplete. When those resources deplete, we need to be able to sustain not only the north but also all of Alberta.

NADC's role in helping to chart the course of the north will be increasingly vital as the region becomes more important economically to the province. Mr. Chairman, NADC is working to increase skill development. Together with Advanced Education we do provide bursaries to approximately 250 Alberta students in a wide range of programs. These students then return and live in northern communities.

The NADC strongly believes in developing northern transportation corridors, including air, road, and rail. Air is extremely important to us as for some of our isolated communities it's the only link to the outside world. It gives us an opportunity also in making sure that we have contact with our health authorities or our health services in the larger centres. When we look at roads, as I said before, the distance between our communities, the distance between our populated areas is so vast, and we need that connection. I want to also say that the rail is critical in order to enable us to deliver our product to market. The north east-west connector is required to link Alberta to Saskatchewan and British Columbia and, ultimately, coastal waters for the movement of northern products to markets.

With continued support for the NADC and its initiatives, NADC can help northern communities develop their economic base and increase their economic contribution to the Alberta advantage. Increasing the economic base of northern Alberta increases the economic base for all of Alberta.

Mr. Chairman, I very much enjoyed working with the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and I look forward to continuing to work in supporting northern Alberta. Thank you so much.

Ms Calahasen: Just a comment. I just wanted to say that I look forward to . . .

The Chair: Hon. minister, your time has elapsed.

Ms Calahasen: Oh, is it up? Okay. I'll look forward to answering any questions. That's what I was going to say.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to begin debate on the aboriginal affairs budget. If I may, I'd like to divide my time into two or three smaller blocks if that's acceptable so that I can get some answers from the minister.

Once again I see a fairly substantial increase in the aboriginal affairs budget this year. In fact, back in I think it was '04-05, the aboriginal affairs budget was just about \$16 million. Now we're looking at a budget of \$24 million. That's gone up almost \$9 million. I'm not saying that this is an altogether bad thing. I think that we should be spending a substantial amount of money on our aboriginal people and Métis people. But, again, it's awfully difficult to tell from a budget report if we're actually getting value for our money.

Now, I'm having sort of a case of déjà vu here, Mr. Chairman. Last year when we were doing the budget debate, I had exactly the same problem. We had a line that said aboriginal affairs and one large amount of money: a single line, aboriginal affairs, \$22,292 million. That was the extent of the information. This year we have exactly the same situation: aboriginal affairs, \$24,624,000.

You know, Mr. Chairman, when I look through the rest of the budget document, I can't really find any other department that dismisses 70 per cent of its budget in one line. It makes it very difficult to accurately debate what's in the budget, and I think it's

important that we do bring up some of the items that are contained in it.

I would like to refer back to a letter that the minister wrote to me last year when I asked her to outline what was in the budget and to expand on a few of these things in her first set of answers to me. In last year's budget the aboriginal affairs total included aboriginal initiatives worth \$5.7 million; strategic services, \$1.7 million; aboriginal land and legal issues, \$2.5 million; aboriginal consultation, \$6.8 million; Métis settlements ombudsman, \$450,000; Métis settlements land registry, \$222,000. I would like the minister to take a little bit of time and tell us if these are roughly the same numbers for this year or if they're substantially different or if we're seeing the same things being funded.

I'm particularly interested in the aboriginal consultation, which the minister mentioned before. I believe last year we were looking at – I think she said that it was \$5 million. I was under the impression that it was predominantly for – sorry; what was the name of the document? – the aboriginal consultation policy, and I think most of the money went into that. That document is now almost a year old, a year old on May 16, I think, and I'd just like to know if the funding for that is finished or if we are going to see more of that. So if you can update us on the status of that document, particularly what the reaction was from the aboriginal community if you have any sort of surveys or research that has been done to see what they thought of it.

As I recall – and I have it right here in front of me – it was a rather thin document. It was all of six pages. In my discussions with aboriginal leaders it was sort of shrugged off and not considered to be really a particularly important document, and they had some serious concerns about it.

I'm glad to see so much money is going into traditional use studies. Again, these are things that we've heard are very important to the aboriginal community, and I hope that you're going to continue with this. I understand a large part, as you said, of the budget increase is because of the traditional use studies. Again, this would have been a lot easier if I had known about this ahead of time. So if I could ask if in future budget documents the minister would please break down the department the way she did in the letter that she sent to me last year, a more itemized listing so that we can have a little bit better debate and a better idea of where all the money is going. As I said, we had an awful lot of money wrapped up in one line. If I could get a commitment from the minister to next year include more information in the budget. I don't know if that was a yes or a no look on her face. It's kind of hard to tell. I don't know if she's trying to hide anything from me; I kind of doubt it. But it is very difficult to do this without enough information.

I'd just like to summarize a few of the things that I would like you to answer in your first set of answers, please. I'd just like to confirm if the aboriginal consultation is carrying on or whether that document is finished, if you would confirm that you will improve the documentation or the line items in the budget so that we have a little bit more to go on, and on the consultation process what the status is right now and the reaction from the aboriginal community to the consultation process.

I think that I gave you a fair amount to answer there. I would like to give you a few minutes to answer and then come back with some more questions if I may.

3:30

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I know that's always a question: where has the money gone? That's always

an issue. I'll just give you a breakdown as to what's happened. In 2006-07 budget summaries, of course, it's \$26.776 million. Minister's office is at \$380,000. Corporate Services is \$1.772 million, which includes budgets for the deputy minister, communications, information technology, and, of course, financial services. Strategic services receives \$3.695 million, which includes such things as federal/provincial relations, cross-ministry initiatives, and urban aboriginal initiatives.

The other part that we put money into, of \$9.924 million, is First Nations and Métis relations. First Nations economic partnerships initiative is included in there, and that's what I was explaining, getting First Nations ready for what they sometimes call job-ready or partnership-ready. Of course, First Nations relations, and that's dealing with issues such as described earlier in my speech, and Métis relations.

The next area is land and resource issues of \$11.005 million. That deals with consultation and traditional land-use studies, land negotiations, whatever negotiations we do have ongoing. Of course, that's to remove barriers to on-reserve economic development.

Mr. Chairman, the other part is on consultation. You wanted to know: what is the status of that? The consultation, as you know, was approved by cabinet on May 16, 2005. It's been a year and some months since we've put that into play. This actually brought together what we call a cross-ministry team comprised of six departments, and of course we're the lead in that respect. We have Environment, we have Energy, we have Sustainable Resource Development, we've got Justice, and we've got Community Development as the cross-ministry initiative because, no matter what happens, these different ministries are all impacted on any issue relative to First Nations. So we want to make sure that they're at the table. They've been excellent. Our ministers have been excellent. For our ministry it has just been incredible working with some of the areas.

Of course, one of the areas that we've been working on is on status with First Nations and industry in sort of advisory groups. We've developed what we call a framework document for the operational guidelines. We are actually in the process of doing that. That's with First Nations as well as with industry. We're not there yet, but we're getting close. We did develop an interim strategy for us to use for this year so that everybody knew what needed to be done and what could be done and how we should interact with each other. We did do that this year until we were finished the guidelines.

We hope that that framework will be done by spring 2006 and operational guidelines, of course, by August of 2006. We're pretty close, but we're not there yet. I was hoping that we'd be able to get that done, but we haven't yet.

We have what we call a tripartite approach as well. In this we embarked on a tripartite approach where representatives from First Nations, industry, and government have formally met together to discuss target dates, and of course the deliverables of that specific area. We have just begun, and it's clear to everyone who was at the table that consultation will be ongoing – it's not just once, but it's ongoing – and that we continue even after completion of the guidelines. So everybody knows that it's going to be ongoing and that we have to continue to do that.

We have a quarterly newsletter, and I think you've received that. I've sent that to you before. The cross-ministry working group has also published a quarterly newsletter. We call it, I think it was, fast facts, and it's intended to communicate progress and key dates to all parties. Of course, the department website houses updates and information on the framework as well as on the guidelines. So if you look on your www.gov.ab.ca and click on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Alberta, you will see my beautiful face there, but not

only that – I thought everybody was not awake here – you will also see that we've got a listing of activities and that is updated on a regular basis so that we can ensure that we have information updated for the people.

What have we accomplished to date? That's always a big question because everybody says: well, you spend so much money on aboriginal people, so what in the world have you accomplished? As a result, you know, we always look and say: what are our deliverables here? What is it that we need to do to make sure that we do this? I know that everybody says: well, we're supportive of aboriginal issues, but we want to see something happen. Right? It's never trying to make sure that the First Nations are going to be prepared to do a number of things on their own as well.

Let me just give you an idea. We participated in developing the guidelines, as I said. The First Nations used this funding program to engage with the government on the development of the consultation guidelines because we need to make sure that they have the capacity to do that. That's a very important thing. The government of Alberta's First Nations consultation policy that was approved certainly provides us with the ability to be able to move the money into that area. We have a project plan in place and a target date, as I indicated, for the guidelines. Of course, there's always a growing ability and willingness of First Nations to participate in this consultation process.

On that note, you indicate that you had spoken to a few aboriginal groups or First Nations leaders. I'm not exactly sure. I would say that the majority, if not all, Treaty 6, 7, and 8 have all participated in our consultation guideline development as well as in the policy. In the beginning they weren't sure whether or not they wanted to be involved in a policy, but as they began to see what it could produce and how they can become engaged and how they can engage industry so that they can begin to see the benefits, we saw that the First Nations were willing to come on board and work with us in good faith. As a result, we have made sure that we are working with them to ensure that what we are going to bring forward is going to be applicable to all that do anything on resource development.

The consultation offices. I'll just give you an example: the First Nations consultation offices. We have 15 First Nations, six tribal councils or regional organizations, one treaty organization, and three nonstatus communities that have established a one-window consultation office to deal with resource development. I remember at one point in time when you talked to me, you told me that one of the problems was: who is it that's in charge when you go to the community? Well, that has been the issue when we're dealing with First Nations as well. So what we have done with the consultation is to make sure that there is going to be a one-window approach so that when industry goes – and industry have often said: who is it that we get in touch with? – into that area, they'll be able to know who they can contact and how they can get that information to the people as to what they are intending to do and how they can be involved.

We also have the Woodland Cree First Nation community consultation office. That's also a one-window approach. We have the Loon River First Nation and, of course, Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council. As my colleague the NADC chair indicated, northern Alberta is where most of the activity is occurring, and as a result, the First Nations in those areas are also wanting to be part of the economic scene. So this is basically trying to pull it all together and make sure that they are. They are Albertans too.

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

Mr. Tougas: Thank you. I still didn't get an answer to the change in the way you're going to do your budgeting, which I would

appreciate. Just say yes or no. If you don't want to do it, I'd like to know why you wouldn't like to do it. As I said, I think the public needs to have some idea. I know that not too many people look through budget documents, but it would be a very valuable tool for myself or for anybody else who wants to look through these documents. If you could commit to changing that for next year so that it's more in line with other budget documents that we have here.

Secondly, regarding consultation. I did ask if you know whether you've done any surveys, a postconsultation document and see what the aboriginal community thinks of it and if you have anything that you can show us or tell us about.

On to a couple of other items. The Métis settlements legislation, I believe, expires in '07, I think that's correct, the \$10 million a year payment. I'd just like to quote something from the business plan. On page 62 it says: "While the Settlements have made significant progress towards greater self-reliance, consideration of strategies to continue that progress is required." Can you put that into some form of English that makes a little bit more sense? Does that mean that this is not working well; it's working well? Do you anticipate at the end of 2007 that we're going to have to renew the agreement? What can you tell us about that?

3:40

While still on the topic of the business plan there's a bit of an anomaly in the 2005 business plan to this year that I'd like you to address. The 2005 business plan on page 118 under core business 1, goal 2, line 2.a was: Métis settlements self-generated revenue from industrial taxation, user fees and levies. There was a target of \$4.09 million for '05-06 and further goals going up to '08. I can't find that line anywhere in the business document for this year. I'm wondering if it has been dropped, if it was inadvertently dropped, if it's placed somewhere else. It seems like it's an interesting piece of information. I don't know whether it means that they're working more towards generating their own revenue or exactly what it means. Can you tell us what it meant in the first place, and why it has disappeared from this year's document?

On to another slightly larger topic: the Kelowna accord. I know that the Kelowna accord is not in your budget, and it was a federal government responsibility. It was still a very substantial agreement, \$5.5 billion. It took several years to cobble this together. Then the new Conservative government came in, your Conservative cousins – I've been looking for a chance to say that for about a year now, and there it is – your Ottawa cousins pulled the plug on it. Apparently, they're going to substitute it with their own plan worth substantially less money than we have right now.

I wonder if the minister agreed with the cancellation of the Kelowna accord and if there's anything that the minister is looking at to sort of fill in the gaps which the cancellation of the accord has left. I mean, we had a major agreement here that was going to impact on aboriginal lives for some time. Is there anything that you see as the aboriginal affairs minister that you can move in to fill the void? Or if you actually agreed with the cancellation of the accord? I believe your exact wording was that it was sad. But, you know, is sad enough? I would like to hear a little bit of your opinion on the Kelowna accord and what you can do as an aboriginal affairs minister.

I have more questions than that, but I'd be happy to just hear your answers now and then get back to you a little bit later on. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, you asked quite a lot of questions there, so what I'll do is attempt to answer as

many as I can. What I'll do is, first of all, thank you. I will commit to making sure that we have a breakdown in the budget because I think it's very easy, you know. I mean, it's not a huge task. It's just very small, so I guess that's what we were doing. I will make sure that we do that next year. We'll continue to do whatever we can.

Yes, settlements. You gave me a whole series of questions. Métis settlements, those seven, are we going to renew the agreement, the self-generated targets? Okay. Is it dropped? Well, let me talk about the Métis settlements. What we've done is that we actually did a process called a transition assessment and planning process, it's called TAPP. What we wanted to do is to make sure that we reviewed the progress toward the goal of self-reliance and to develop recommendations which would contribute to ongoing progress towards self-reliance, which was something that the Métis also wanted to see happen. Because that agreement was over and the statutory funding will end in '07, we wanted to make sure that we engaged the settlements. In the last few years since I've been minister, I've been talking to the settlements to tell them that we have to start planning. We have to put together what it is that the requirement will be because we don't know what the requirement will be.

When you were asking about that information on the self-generated target dollars, that was one of the reasons why we had that in there: to be able to determine how far they had come. But because of the way that it was worded, it was something that we wanted to redo again and see where we're at. As a result, we removed that one, and then we'll be putting another one in to be able to identify what we need to do for that. That's working with the settlements; it's not something that we want to do unilaterally. We want to make sure that we have something that we can use as a target, a measurable outcome, so we will continue to work with the settlements on that.

What we wanted to do on the whole issue is develop that process so that we can see where they want to go, what it is that they're going to need. It's like municipalities. You know, they're always knowing that there's going to be a portion of dollars that will probably always come from government. We want to see where that gap is, and we want to be able to work with the settlements to see where it is that we need to go. We're still working on that, and we'll continue to work with the settlements on that issue.

As you know, establishing a governance structure as well as providing land for Métis people is a first across Canada, and it's the only one across Canada. The Métis settlements certainly want to make sure that they continue to salvage that and do whatever needs to be done. We've done a lot of data collection, of course, on many of these issues, and even though we've made significant progress towards that goal of the legislation, the fulfillment of the goals has not yet been achieved, so we want to be able to go towards that.

We made amendments to the Metis Settlements Act, if you recall. It was my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake who was involved in that, and those amendments were to make sure that we did changing in the decision-making process, the elections, and the ability of Métis settlements to enact new policies so that they could contribute toward the goal of self-reliance.

As I indicated, the Premier signed recently, actually just this last year – was it just last year? He signed that agreement on how we can explore ways of being able to see how we can work together to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency and work towards some sort of an agreement.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the hard work that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has

done to prepare this budget and the work of her ministry management and staff as well. Certainly, it's a very straightforward document. I appreciate having the role of a constructive critic to go through it. It's very easy to follow, and I appreciate the efforts that went into it.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is a very wide-ranging ministry, and like many of our other ministries in this government it really touches on other important ministries and areas of concern. As the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul pointed out, we often look north to the wealth that we are enjoying in this province, yet I think the reciprocal investment in northern Alberta for development of social services and infrastructure and all of the various human and natural needs that we administer here in this province is sometimes not even close to being commensurate with the wealth that we take out of that area.

I believe that this particular ministry has as its mandate, above all, to ensure that we are giving in equal amounts to what we take from the north. The people that live in northern Alberta and the wonderful resources that we have in northern Alberta deserve nothing less. It's a place where our future lies in many ways for the province, and we have to make sure that we manage that in the most judicious way possible.

The budget for this year for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is \$5 million more than last year. This is, of course, \$3.3 million to assist in the acceleration of the traditional use studies, which are meant to assist First Nations to map sites of historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. Completion of this TUS is a key component of the government's consultation initiative. This is very directly linked to resource development and land management because, of course, we have to recognize the cultural and spiritual significance of different places before we can develop different regions of the north in a responsible manner. This is an important initiative, and I certainly am fully supportive of it.

3:50

Other parts of the budget look to assist the ongoing development of accountable self-administering, self-regulating, and self-reliant Métis settlement organizations, again a very, very important component of the budget of this ministry. There certainly are areas of concern I have in regard to how this ministry assists this goal, although, at least in principle, on paper we do have laudable intentions in regard to the Métis settlements throughout northern Alberta, and for that I am grateful. This is a very vibrant and important part of our overall cultural fabric in this province, and in fact we can benefit, all of us, from the existence and the flourishing of these settlements, I believe, and we need to do everything we can to invest in their future.

Aboriginal Affairs' budget is also meant to be promoting social and economic development. It's meant to be collaborating with other ministries to work on specific problem areas. There are areas of concern, and certainly I will be speaking on a couple of those areas here this afternoon.

Finally, looking for the goal of self-reliance for aboriginal people throughout the province: I think that that again is certainly a laudable goal on paper, although sometimes I'm wondering what, in fact, we are doing in reality to forward that notion.

Perhaps I'll start with that last goal there, Mr. Chairman, to make my comments on specific areas of the budget: improving the quality of life for aboriginal people with the goal of self-reliance. Of course, most aboriginal people in this province are self-reliant. It's important to recognize that. Part of, I guess, the integrity of an individual is to know that they have the freedom and the latitude to make decisions about their future and about their own economic

future. Most aboriginal people are in that position. We need to defend and strengthen that position so that they can stay that way. Often there is this very broad misconception that there is money being poured into aboriginal initiatives without anything coming out the other end. We as a Legislature look for efficiencies in the public expenditure of monies, but certainly it's important to recognize that, in fact, aboriginal people are self-reliant and are independent and have the freedom to make those choices, economic choices especially, so we have to work based on that premise.

Anyway, that being said, on the improvement of quality of life for aboriginal people, I have a number of questions to direct to the minister. She can answer them at her freedom, whatever she wants to do, in writing or here this afternoon.

The first one is that I want to ask the minister what she is doing about this issue I brought up yesterday in my private member's statement, which is the very large overrepresentation of aboriginal people in corrections facilities. The minister during the budget for the Solicitor General said that our population of aboriginals in Alberta is about 7 per cent or so. Actually, I would say perhaps a little bit higher. However, he said that aboriginal people make up 30 per cent of the adult in-house correctional centre counts and approximately 38 per cent of the young offender in-house correctional centre counts. This is an issue that, as I spoke about yesterday briefly, reflects very poorly on what we have been doing here as a province and as a society to address poverty issues, to address sort of addiction issues, and to address the migration of aboriginal people from the rural areas into the city.

This is a very large social phenomenon that we will be seeing over the next many, many years, people moving from the rural areas to the cities, to Edmonton and Calgary and other centres. We must be sure that we are allowing a smooth transition for people to do so. We're not going to turn the clock back on this migration of people but, rather, to make sure that there are programs available, housing available, and schools that are appropriate to meet the needs of people moving in from the rural areas. So this is one concern that I have, and certainly there are many others in regard to why we have such a high prison population of aboriginal descent in this province.

I think that this is a good starting place for us to focus our energies in this ministry, and that's why I'm asking: what specific budget initiatives do we expect to see to tackle this problem? As I said yesterday in my member's statement, we have an opportunity now to build structures to defuse the situation. If we allow things to continue the same way, we're contributing to what I would say is a powder keg of social problems in this province that will spill over to affect all of us. Certainly, for such a high percentage of aboriginals to be in the correctional centres is a very debilitating thing for families and for the individuals themselves who find themselves in the cycle of a prison system, and we need to do something more.

Another question I would like to ask the minister, if possible, please, is: what new funding program support is being offered to native friendship centres? These centres have been doing yeoman's work, a very effective use of public monies to create cultural centres for aboriginal and Métis people in the cities and towns around the province. I have at least two of these facilities in my own constituency. They are wonderfully vibrant centres of pride and a place to teach culture and diversity and acceptance. I know that they're always riding on the edge in terms of financing, and I would like to encourage more support being directed towards native friendship centres, and I'm asking the minister what she has up her very fine sleeve in that regard.

The third question in regard to quality of life that I have to ask this afternoon is: how is the minister co-ordinating efforts with the Minister of Community Development to prepare education and other

sorts of campaigns to combat discrimination and prejudice against First Nations peoples? It's like talking about the elephant in the room, Mr. Chairman, when I speak of the high prison population of aboriginal people, and certainly it is in no small part due to a lingering racist sort of feeling in our community toward aboriginal people. It's a battle that is not easy to fight, but it's absolutely essential to fight, to break down these barriers through education and contact so that we're not perpetuating this disease of prejudice against a certain group of people here in the province. Investing in campaigns to combat this is absolutely essential, and I would ask what we might be able to do, not just with the Community Development minister but also with the Department of Education in this regard. I think it's important.

I am glad to see that certainly there is a focus on the Métis settlements in the budget, and I just wanted to comment on that briefly as well.

4:00

Another issue that I'd like to speak about just very briefly is the Métis interim harvesting agreement. I guess what I would be asking for, Mr. Chairman, is what the minister is proposing to do to attempt to build a lasting agreement that is going to work for all stakeholders – in this case, really, all Albertans – in regard to what sort of Métis harvesting agreement we can come up with on a more permanent basis.

We saw quite a reversal of the position of the interim agreement. I certainly do have sympathy with the minister in regard to how it was necessary to have some sort of thing in place. In the wake of the Powley agreements we had to act on something and sort of feel the issue out to some degree. I know that there is a huge frustration in regard to really knowing what sort of harvesting, what sort of hunting and fishing activity is going on in the rural areas, especially in the north, since this is such a vast place and is really impossible to monitor in any real way.

The best conservation system that we have, just like any law that we create in our society, is for people to buy into that law and to internalize it in their own behaviours. Right? When I drive my car or do things in the public realm, it's not the fear of the police that's monitoring my behaviour. Rather, it's an acceptance of a set of rules or regulations that you see are going to be for the safety, for the welfare of yourself and your family and everybody else. So the same thing with whatever agreement we do come up with in regard to hunting and fishing and harvesting of natural resources in general in the north: it has to be something that people will buy into and internalize and monitor themselves on.

If I do have one criticism of the interim harvesting agreement, it's that it gave this feeling amongst the other hunting and fishing population that perhaps someone was gaining an unfair advantage, so maybe it was easy for them to not comply with the law as well. When you create the situation where people perceive that something is unfair, then they will say: well, the laws aren't working anyway, so why should I follow them? So this is a very, very dangerous thing to play with. I'm actually glad that there was some push back and that we had the MLA task force on this to perhaps be a moderating influence on the whole discussion.

Now, here we are. We need to create something that's going to last. We need to create something that people will buy into, and ultimately it has to include the conservation of the resources that we're finding under dispute in the first place because, of course, Mr. Chair, if we have a situation where our wildlife populations and fish populations are being depleted not just through hunting but through the loss of habitat of these wildlife populations, then of course it's a moot point to discuss who gets to harvest what if there's nothing left to hunt or to fish. So that has to be a factor as well.

So I certainly welcome the discussion and would be happy to contribute to the discussion, to a solution and would like to see what specific elements of this budget the minister has to put in place a dialogue for interested parties to come to some long-term resolution in regard to the Métis harvesting controversy.

One more issue that I did want to bring up is the whole issue of labour, encouraging labour force initiatives amongst the aboriginal population in the north. Of course, the unemployment rate in different places is wildly out of step with the rest of the province, and it's absolutely essential that we continue to hammer away at this. Some people feel as though we're not seeing much improvement, so what's the point? You know, part of the reason that people are moving into the urban areas, this migration from the rural areas, is that people do want something better for themselves and for their families. So, obviously, if the will is there, we have to step up then and encourage that with some programs that are appropriate to the situation that we have at hand.

I do see some marginal increases in the employment rates for aboriginal people in the north, and that's great, but certainly there is a very large population there that is not being employed. We want to reverse that to meet the needs that we have, the labour shortage that we have here across the province but also to break the cycle of poverty, especially for the young people in the north.

So with that, I will leave off, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to comments from the minister. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd like to thank you for recognizing the fact that there was a lot of work that went into this budget. My departmental staff certainly play a major role and want to make sure that they address the issues that I think we are all interested in, which is to help improve the lives of aboriginal people, not the fact that we want to do it but that we want to be able to work with the First Nations and the Métis communities. I think that for too long there have been people who wanted to change things, but they wanted to change them for their own reasons rather than for the aboriginal people. So I thank you for that.

Also, I'm glad to see that you are supporting the traditional land-use studies. They are a very important part for aboriginal people. Any kind of historical, traditional sites that they have participated in, it is really important for them that they be mapped. I know that they've been working really hard to make sure that their elders will give them the direction. As well, in many instances there are children that are being asked to be involved. What it has done is that it has increased the knowledge within the community of not only the medicinal sites but also the cultural sites and all the other kind of historical sites that we do have. So I think that it has opened up a lot of education that needed to be done and the interaction between the elders and the youth. So I think that's a very, very important component, and I'm glad that you're supporting that. So I appreciate those comments.

Now, in terms of some of the other areas that you have requested information on, I'll start out with a number of other places here that I think I really need to deal with. You were talking about the overrepresentation in the correctional facilities. The overrepresentation of the aboriginal people in the corrections system is sometimes a result of what happened in early childhood and in many instances the education. People don't have enough education to be able to deal with the challenges in life.

What we as a government have been working on and working in co-operation with the Minister of Education is the First Nations,

Métis, and Inuit policy. That policy identifies different strategies for working with a community to see how we can improve the outcome of children who are going to school so that we don't see the high dropout rates that have occurred in the past. So we see that there are many liaison officers that have been hired. There are many other strategies that are being utilized by different school divisions and boards that want to see things happen. So we see that now really coming forward. I am a very strong proponent of making sure that we do implement those recommendations that have been made, as well, by the Commission on Learning. As you will recall, there were, I think, about 15 recommendations on aboriginal learning. On that you will see that they were trying to address the very concerns that you're talking about which lead in many instances to people being involved in the justice area.

So those are some of the places that we've been trying to work on; that is, prevention as well as child welfare. The Children's Services minister has really worked on some of the early intervention and many of those other areas. Certainly, we've been involved with Children's Services in cross-ministry initiatives as well as youth programs that would be able to address some of those concerns. We have also worked with communities to make sure that we look at job skills and training so that for the training and the job skills that they lack we can start to work with Advanced Education and Human Resources and Employment to ensure that we work together.

4:10

In my speech I spoke about cross-ministry initiatives. We are involved with various ministries on anything to do with aboriginal issues. I indicated that we're not a program-delivery ministry. We're very strategic. We try to make sure that we advise the Minister of Children's Services, advise the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, advise many of the other ministries to make sure that they understand what aboriginal issues are all about and in some cases northern issues as well. So what we do is make sure that we continue to work with the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice to see how we can have more understanding of aboriginal culture, make sure that they understand that maybe we need to look at ways of working together to ensure that we don't see that overrepresentation.

Hopefully, we can address what I call systemic issues of residential schools. That's another area that we have to deal with. I'm very pleased to see that the federal government is going to honour that agreement that had been made. I'm very proud of the fact that that will happen because there are people still stuck in that area, and we need to move them on. So I think it's important to be able to address that.

The second issue. You talked about the migration of aboriginal people into the cities. We have worked with a number of communities, and we have what we call the urban aboriginal strategy. The urban aboriginal strategy, basically, addresses urban needs so that we can look at a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach on the part of governments and the aboriginal community and other stakeholders who are interested. Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge are urban communities that belong to the urban aboriginal strategy, and the federal government provides significant financial resources to develop and implement community-based processes and strategies. In other communities, like Red Deer and Grande Prairie, my staff at the department is working with interested parties to develop strategies on issues and needs specific to aboriginal people in those communities.

We also work with the AUMA, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, as well as the AAMD and C, Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, to improve relationships between

aboriginal communities and these organizations. It is true that the people are migrating into the cities. What are we doing to see what we can do? I have to commend the AUMA and AAMD and C for pulling together what they call an urban aboriginal group committee to see what can be done to address the issues. They have made recommendations as well. The First Nations have also approached us to see what they can do to help us along as they're going through. They do have offices in the cities that try to deal with the people who have migrated to the urban centres.

When you're talking about the friendship centres, I always credit friendship centres for being able to be the transition point. I certainly used friendship centres when I first moved to the city. I am a very strong supporter of friendship centres because I think they do so much work, such as yeoman's work on dealing with the transitional concerns of the aboriginal community. It's almost the first place where people go to because there's nowhere else to go. So they have prepared some really fantastic work and done some really fantastic work.

I want to talk about the friendship centres because I really am a very strong believer that we have to provide them with more funds. I really do. We will do whatever we can. I gave them some advice as to how we can begin to work so that they can garner support from us as we go through with our budget. Certainly, we'll be requesting you guys as MLAs to help as well so that you can also support that information and so they can spread the word as to what they've been doing. Even though they've done some really great things, not everybody knows that they have. What I did with them was ask them to do business plans, so they can share those with the people, and then I provided dollars for somebody to go help them with their business plans. They've worked some really fantastic business plans, and I know that they'll continue to do so. We do give \$24,000 annually to 20 community friendship centres. The majority of their funds come from the federal government, as you know. But the way that they've been looking at funding, I didn't have enough money to be able to spread for them to get more money. I was able to glean about \$100,000 in additional funding, so what we did then was that we asked them to provide us with some ideas as to what they wanted to do in addition to what they've been doing.

What we found was that the funding that they requested – and I'll just give you a listing of those. The Red Deer Native Friendship Centre received \$20,000 to establish its community liaison function. High Prairie Native Friendship Centre asked for \$20,000 to provide youth programs. Alberta Native Friendship Centre Association asked for \$25,000 to assist in project management training to individual friendship centre personnel. The friendship centre in Peace River, Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, received \$9,994 to assist with a spiritual and health gathering. They deal with everything. It's not just a transition, but it's health; it's everything. Sik-Ooh-Kotoki Friendship Society in Lethbridge to assist with youth initiatives received \$25,000.

So whenever I was able to get more money or find money somewhere, we were able to provide it to the friendship centres so that they can continue the good work that they've been doing.

They had a great loss recently, the association itself. Their executive director passed away recently. He is going to be a great loss, and that's something that I know they're going to have to deal with.

You also wanted to know what we are doing with quality of life, community development to combat discrimination. Well, that's a big one when we're talking about discrimination. When I was first here, for many years I certainly know what it felt like to be treated differently. As a result, understanding those kinds of things, what we want to do is make sure that we deal with as many of the groups

as possible. Community Development, as you know, has the mandate to work on that specifically.

We have some people who have been dealing with that issue in different ways. I'll give you an example. If you recall, there have been some really negative articles, you know, about being an aboriginal person. The aboriginal community itself has taken control of that. They said: "We want to be able to do it. We don't need somebody to talk on our behalf." They've taken that on themselves and decided to address anything that's overt, to be able to deal with it head-on, and I have really appreciated their work in doing that. That tells me that we have gained a lot of respect for ourselves.

The Chair: Hon. members, the noise level is getting too loud in here. Would you please keep the conversations down?

Hon. minister, please proceed.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As a result, what I see is that they want to be able to take control of that, and they want to be able to address that, and they've been doing it. We'll be there to support them as they need us, but as you know, as a nation gets stronger, they begin to deal with those issues themselves. So I see that as really strong, and I want to commend them on that.

You also talked about the aboriginal labour issue. Aboriginal people actually participating in Alberta's economy have historically higher unemployment rates compared to all other Albertans, but it was really nice to see that the off-reserve aboriginal participation rate in March 2006 was 69.3 per cent, an increase of 3.7 per cent from March 2005. I was happy to see that we were starting to record that kind of information, mostly because when we know what's not going on, we know how we have to address it because then it gives us some ability to be able to know what we should do.

4:20

As a result of the higher than normal participation rate of aboriginal people in the labour force, what we started to look at was: how can we work with the aboriginal community? As a result, the Minister of Advanced Education started to work on apprenticeship possibilities. As you know, the number of aboriginal apprentices in Alberta recently reached 1,126, an increase of 888 apprentices in less than four years. That is something that needs to be spoken about, and we have to be able to talk about how good this is because what we see now is not the only fact. The aboriginal community is getting educated. They're also getting the training and the skills to be able to take advantage of what's happening here so that we can begin to see that high unemployment rate drop, just the way it has with other Albertans. So we want to continue to do that.

Off-reserve aboriginal-specific data for Alberta indicated, actually, a few changes, and I want to just talk about the unemployment rates over the past year if I can. The total Alberta in March '05 was 3.5 per cent. March '06 was 3.3 per cent. The change was minus .2 per cent. The total Alberta aboriginal was 12.4 per cent in March '05. In '06 it was 7.5 per cent. The change was minus 4.9 per cent. As an example, Métis was 9.4 per cent in '05. In March '06 it was 6.4 per cent. The change is minus 3 per cent. So when you look at all that, it tells you a lot of items which I think a lot of people don't even recognize.

Now, there was another area that you wanted to talk about. During the past year, actually, April '05 to April '06, aboriginal employment increased by 6,000 new jobs in Alberta. That's significant. That's significant. It's a lot of work, but I know that the aboriginal community is ready to take that on.

Let me now talk about the Métis harvesting. You wanted to know what we are doing with that. Actually, we've accepted the MLA committee. We knew we were breaking new ground when we did the first agreement. It was an interim agreement, and we wanted to make sure that we could deal with the issues so that it didn't create chaos on the land. What we did was that we requested the Métis community to come and work with us. If we hadn't, there were other areas that they could have continued to work on such as private land. They could have gone and hunted on private land without any kind of rules. So what we did was that we asked them to come and work with us, and they did. They took us at our word. We signed the interim agreement until we could find out what was going to be going on.

There were a lot of people who didn't quite understand the interim agreements. There were a lot of people who kind of read more into them than what was there. There was a lot of fearmongering that occurred. There were a lot of areas that, I think, people kind of wondered about, you know. Of course, as a government the suggestion the standing policy committee made was that we have an MLA committee, and we did. There were three MLAs that led that task force, and as a result they made recommendations. Those recommendations were then taken in, and we will be working towards some sort of a – we don't know what the agreement will look like. It's a changing landscape. Even as we're talking here, there are court cases that are coming forward. As a result, we want to make sure that whatever agreement we have will accommodate those kinds of things.

What else is there that you wanted to know? I think that was it for now. Whatever I missed, I will give you in writing.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to thank the minister and her department for their presentation. It's a very, very important department, that probably doesn't have the budget it should have when we look at the importance of aboriginal affairs in the next decade and beyond in Alberta. The linking of aboriginal affairs with northern development, I think, is apt, and there are many issues where aboriginal development is linked with northern development although there are issues in the south as well.

I will begin to talk about some general areas and give a lot of questions on both northern development and aboriginal affairs and some of the ways they do link. First, I'll look at the importance, I think, of positive role models and whether or not the department could do something to improve the highlighting of positive role models for our burgeoning and growing aboriginal population. Edmonton will be the biggest aboriginal city in the country very soon.

I salute the work of the government, individuals, industry, and such. There's a growing number of lawyers, nurses, teachers, tradesmen, entrepreneurs, business leaders, union leaders that are from the aboriginal population, people I've worked with. For example, Dave Tuccaro of Neegan Development, an excellent role model; Doug Golosky of Golosky Trucking and Clearwater Welding; and Mickey Demers: all aboriginal entrepreneurs that have worked to do well in many areas in the north and have developed our economy and trained many aboriginals themselves. Another would be Darrell LaBoucan, the head of the ironworkers' union. There are many. Of course, the minister herself and the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: great role models to many in northern Alberta and Alberta as a whole. The government has a clear role in encouraging prosperity and self-reliance, and ensuring that these positive role models are maybe put forward a bit more into our media, into our public viewpoint would be good.

There are a number of issues, and I'll get into particulars. One is actually going back to the Northern Alberta Development Council report of 2003-2004, page 17. I don't see it really addressed completely, and that's the issue in many communities of health and social services per-capita funding and the effect of transient workers. What is being done? This is clearly a cross-ministry initiative. It clearly affects the north and, actually, clearly affects many aboriginal communities as well, especially in the Fort McMurray area but also in Grande Prairie, High Level, and other areas.

Another important issue – it's been touched on – is the training. In the youth apprenticeship learning opportunities program the pilot communities for this program were Lac La Biche, Wabasca, and High Prairie. The increase in apprentices generally in our native population has been welcomed and good. I think a thousand is not bad, but I think realistically it could be 10,000. There are in Canada over 200,000 young unemployed aboriginals, yet we seem to be wanting to import temporary foreign workers. Some of the people that I have talked to that have been the most vociferous, the most angry about the temporary foreign worker agreement for the oil sands have been aboriginals from northern Alberta.

4:30

The MOU with the Northwest Territories on training, employment, and transportation. I'd like to hear how the development of that has been in terms of looking at developing young workers for the upcoming pipeline work. Actually, there's quite a shortage of pipeline workers developing right now, and for the people who know the area that the pipelines are projected to go through or are going through, there are some good on-the-job training projects possible there right now.

Northern development. Aboriginal development in the north is very much linked with the development of infrastructure and transportation. I'd just like to hear about the developments. Any possibilities for the road from Peavine to McLennan, which may affect the proposed upgrader in the McLennan area? The road from Wabasca to the heights of land near Suncor, commonly known as Supertest Hill. That would link up the Bigstone Cree – I know that there's one prominent member in this Assembly – and that would link up the many thousands of people in Wabasca-Desmarais and also through the Slave Lake area and the back lakes right to the oil sands where most of the work is being done. Also the road from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan. I've been up on that ice road I think three or four times to a historical community, the oldest community, arguably, in Alberta, Fort Chip.

A couple of related things on transportation which would affect commerce and links with the N.W.T. would be the Hythe-Dawson Creek rail link. What is happening? Also the enhancement of the Mackenzie Northern Railway to the N.W.T. Actually, the Hythe-Dawson one is to B.C.

Now, tourism is something of great potential, I think, for northern Alberta. I don't see too much comment here or too much monies actually being directed to specific aboriginal tourism. I know that there's been some success with the love tours from Japan. The love tours: the aurora borealis, the northern lights, were once shining quite often over Japan, and it seemed to be a good time to conceive a child. Now the aboriginal communities north of Fort McMurray and Fort McMurray itself are setting up tours to see the northern lights, and some people have called these love tours. There's great potential for the whole of northern Alberta for these love tours because of the great displays of aurora borealis, of northern lights, in the north. I think that's something to look at in terms of linking up our aboriginal communities with Japan and other areas.

Another area of tourism development I think is in the adventure tour area. There are tremendously interesting areas in the back lakes

and in the sand dunes blowing off Lake Athabasca, little-known sand dunes, fields of sand dunes that look like the Sahara and stretch on for 60, 70, 80 miles. Lake Athabasca, the reed beds of Wood Buffalo, the tremendous natural wonders that are little seen and little developed and hold great potential.

Another area is the traditional land-use studies. This is a question from page 28 of the annual report. I see that data management is somehow included in that, and I don't understand why data management. I wonder how much of the money being apportioned for traditional use studies – I couldn't see that exactly – is actually going to data management. That would be page 28 of the 2004 annual report.

There are many areas regarding the Fort McMurray area. But, first, I'll just touch on the federal urban aboriginal strategy, that the minister mentioned. It's now going on in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge and looking to be a good initiative for the urban centres. The minister did mention that the ministry itself is doing some work in Red Deer and Grande Prairie. Will there be work with the federal government to extend the urban aboriginal strategy into the other urban areas, especially into Fort McMurray and area, the municipality of Wood Buffalo, and other urban areas of Alberta?

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

I was particularly disappointed with the outcome of the Kelowna accord. I think that that should have been brought through. That agreement should not have been broken, that commitment to aboriginal people across Canada. I think that Alberta may have to step in in Alberta to fill the gap in some places that people were expecting to have come forward from that.

Another issue in northern development. This is the regional issues working group in Fort McMurray, especially the transportation portion of that particular group. That's very important for the Fort McMurray area. We've seen that regional issues working group come down here last year after the issue of the problems of infrastructure in the municipality of Wood Buffalo area, the Fort McMurray area, came to the forefront in the media. You know, they've spoken about the road north of Fort McMurray, that we haven't seen come forward in a meaningful way. I think Fort McMurray residents were first told that that was to be completed past Syncrude in 2004.

It's a matter of safety. There have been many deaths on that highway, and many people are concerned. It's the road to Fort MacKay. It's an area that I think has to somehow be looked at very quickly. I don't know if the regional issues working group is doing that or if perhaps they're actually funded in enough of a manner to look at the transportation needs as well as they should. Certainly, highway 63 became an issue that was a high priority, and it's very important, as the minister of human resources just banged a desk to accentuate. It's very important for both development and for the way that people get to Fort McMurray and the north when they go to work and when they travel to go to their home communities.

The other areas in the regional issues working group. Page 67 of the business plan, on the Northern Alberta Development Council, said that the bursary return rate was 78 per cent. I know that that bursary has been in place for many, many years. I know people that have taken advantage of that. It's been for good use to bring people back to the north. But 78 per cent seems to be a pretty low return rate in many ways. Why is that so low? Why are people not being encouraged to make good on their commitment? If they are not making good on the commitment, is the government getting those bursaries back, or to what percentage is the government getting those

bursaries back? Why is the return rate almost three-quarters? It's forecast to get even worse, to go from 78 per cent to 76 per cent.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Going back to the youth apprenticeship and the need for the training of aboriginals and the potential for it, I have seen many, many great tradesmen developed in the last 10 years. Indeed, there are many good mechanics, ironworkers. The Mohawks, for example, in eastern Canada are famous for their skyscraper work and lack of fear, almost, the ability to work – [interjection] There you go – in a way that is both productive and gets the job done. They've developed a reputation whereby they are an employee of first choice.

4:40

Certainly, a lot of mechanics and crane operators have developed their entrepreneurial skills by becoming tradesmen first. I mentioned Dave Tuccaro, the president of Neegan Development and other companies, winner of many awards for entrepreneurship. He started as a crane operator, a unionized crane operator as a matter of fact.

There are others. I mentioned as well Doug Golosky. I believe he was an ironworker. He employs many, many ironworkers now himself and pipefitters, equipment operators, and others and developed one of the bigger mining contracting operators or purveyors of heavy equipment operators in Fort McMurray and the oil sands area.

You know, these are tremendous role models, and I think that they should be looked to and also utilized sometimes in helping to train, getting self-reliance, getting entrepreneurs coming forward in the aboriginal community, getting people who are taking the lead in social services, in our unions, in our government and other areas. They're all so important to develop these populations and to ensure that they are seen to be the leaders in our society and to gain the full fruits of our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Calahasen: Sure. There were a lot of questions there, so if I don't answer them all, I'll commit to answering them in written form. Let me just sort of highlight some of the areas that you addressed, Edmonton-Manning. The linkage between aboriginal affairs and northern development is important. I agree. I think whatever happens in aboriginal affairs affects north, whatever happens north affects aboriginal people. The majority of people who live in northern Alberta – well, we don't know; maybe there's a little change now – are aboriginal people. So that's, I think, definitely a good link.

You talked about aboriginal role models. I think that's a really good idea. I mean, I'll just list some of the things we've been doing. Maybe if we haven't hit somewhere where you think there are some possibilities, I'd really like to hear what your suggestions would be because I really like that idea of positive role models and how we can make sure that we highlight them. Let me just give you an idea as to what we've been doing, you know, for role models. We do support the Esquao Awards. It's on Friday, and I think you're going to be there in your fine form. No? Oh, boy. That's not good. But, basically, we do that, and that's promoting role models, female role models. I think that's a really fantastic program, and the awards are really highly regarded by the aboriginal community.

We promote aboriginal partnerships, and of course no matter what happens, whether it's job shadowing or whatever it is, we have tried

to encourage that with industry so that people can see that they can do these kinds of things as well. We do National Aboriginal Day. We support the culture and the historical component so that we can sort of let people know and be aware of what the situation is on National Aboriginal Day. It extends to a week, actually.

My staff have been really good in making sure that they are part of whatever happens. They just give of themselves, and in most cases they volunteer. So they've been really excellent role models themselves because I have, in fact, qualified aboriginal employees in my department, and they are looked upon as people who can lead the way in many instances. So I'm really proud of the fact that they've been able to do those kinds of things. Those are examples of areas where we have been involved in the aboriginal role model type of scenario.

The other one, of course, is that we support government publication on aboriginal role models, and that's done through Community Development. We certainly support the minister and his ministry. Just as an example, the chamber of commerce does a really great thing on business awards. They do it for aboriginal organizations, and they do it for aboriginal youth awards that they have just to highlight the fact that aboriginal people are getting involved in the economic scene. There's also the Chamber of Resources. In their awards they recognize successful aboriginal partnerships. I think that Dave got the award in the last little while. My department certainly supports all these initiatives. As I said, they give a lot of their time. It's not part of their job, but they do. So I commend them on what they have been able to do.

Now, you have a number of other issues. On NADC I might want my colleague to get up and do a little speech on some of these areas that you have requested. I'll touch on some, but I think that he would be in a better position to talk about the bursary, you know, the rate. The return rate has actually increased from 74 per cent to 78 per cent. He might want to expand on the bursary and what's been happening. It's a fantastic bursary. As a northerner I have been involved with that bursary, and if it wasn't for that bursary, many northerners would not have been able to be as successful as we are today. I think that that bursary needs to also be provided with a lot of support, so whatever support you can give.

The other part I'll talk about, though, is the temporary work group that you were talking about. We work in a lot of areas on the labour force. I'll just give you an example. Not only is it that we work on making sure that the education – as I indicated earlier to our other colleague, we're trying to work with the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit policy and implement that to increase the high school rates or even up to grade 9 if we can. But if we can keep them to grade 9, then they'll go to grade 12. So we're doing everything that we can to make sure that that occurs.

The other part, of course, is what we call the youth apprenticeship projects, which are key to making sure that they know that there are different streams that they can go into. Of course, the Alberta aboriginal apprenticeship program, which is a very important component, as I indicated earlier: an increase of 888 apprentices in less than four years. That is an incredible amount. Advanced Education and Human Resources have been involved in that. They've really worked in a number of areas.

Let me just talk about that because I think it's important for you to know. In Alberta we have an aboriginal population of approximately 6.7 per cent out of 3 million people. Even if we were to train all the people that are of aboriginal descent, we couldn't keep up with the labour needs. But it's important to note that we need to make sure that we train our own first and we make those opportunities available to our own first. I strongly believe that that's what needs to happen, and the Minister of Human Resources and Employ-

ment has made sure that we continue to do that. We want to ensure that they have those opportunities available to them, but they have to be ready to take those opportunities, for that availability.

In order for us to be able to do that, as I indicated, the educational stream has to be done, but we also have to make sure that we look at how we can help them along. I know that the bursary system is one way. We have a lot of different programs that we could utilize to ensure that we have an ability to move those people who are ready to go into those areas and be primed to be able to do that. That's why when you look at my budget, you will see in there not only the capacity issue but the First Nations economic participation initiative. You will see that we're making sure that they're ready for it. We say pre-employment skills in many instances or preskilled areas. We want to make sure that they're ready for whatever comes their way and they can access that. So we want to make sure that we train our own first, that we're prepared for that.

4:50

There is a labour strategy that's going ahead through Human Resources and Employment, and we're involved in that to ensure that we have an aboriginal labour force strategy within that strategy so that we can see some activity there.

You also asked about the MOU in the Northwest Territories. I was tasked to bring that to life, and what we did was pick strategic areas. What we wanted to make sure of: what is it that's really coming down the pike that aboriginal people can take advantage of as well as northerners? So then we specifically picked training. We picked education. We picked transportation issues. Of course, we wanted to make sure that we would look at tourism and ensure that we are all together in terms of what we wanted to do. The Mackenzie pipeline was the huge issue on the economic side. We wanted to see how Alberta could be primed before that pipeline came down. Of course, Alberta Energy is responsible for anything to do with a pipeline, but what we do is try to make sure that all the areas that we need to cover are covered.

You were talking about northern roads. I know that my colleague will talk about this. The northern road strategy has been in place for a while. As a matter of fact, I think it was in 1995 at the northwestern Premier's meeting. The northwestern first ministers had what they called the northwestern road concept. If you look at that road concept, you will see that the road strategy definitely mirrors somewhat what was being recommended.

You spoke about the Wabasca-Fort McMurray connection. We call that the east-west connector. There have been a lot of people who have wanted to be involved in that. Many of the MDs have really pushed to see this happen, and we have thanked them because I think it's really important. It's actually in the MD of Opportunity, so the MD of Opportunity has now come forward and said: "Now we're ready to take this on because it's within our area. What can we do to get the partners together?" That's basically what we're doing with that. There have been no dollars identified. There have been studies done, and we're just trying to find out what is the best way for us to accomplish that road. We're still pursuing all avenues. The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation is certainly outside to see what can be done.

You also discussed the Peavine-McLennan connection. As you know, the Bluesky upgrader, hopefully, is going to be going in there, and we're making sure that we try to make that connection happen. The community has been the driving force behind that, and we have supported it a hundred per cent. We'll continue to do that.

You also made mention that there are no dollars for aboriginal tourism. We are not a program deliverer. We don't do that. What we do is encourage the various ministries to deal with these issues.

I just want to talk about this because it's really key to tourism. The Minister of Economic Development, when we spoke, agreed to make sure that we would meet with First Nations and Métis leaders. We did that. We talked about tourism: what should we be doing, and how should we be advancing aboriginal tourism? The minister listened to all their comments. They made recommendations. One of the recommendations was to establish an aboriginal tourism council, which he has done, and we worked with him to be able to see that realized and make sure that the aboriginal product is going to be dealt with.

One of the biggest concerns always when we're dealing with aboriginal tourism or any products is that the aboriginal people have to be involved. So what we did as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is commit to make sure that we would have the connection to the aboriginal community. Of course, the aboriginal community says: we want to be involved with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. That's basically where we want to go. So when you look at those areas, we don't deliver services. What we do is talk about strategy; we talk about priorities.

You asked about the federal urban aboriginal strategy: will there be an ability to talk about other cities coming on board? Well, we're looking forward to adding more, but that will depend on the federal government as well. We have to work together. We were very blessed to be able to do that with Lethbridge, to add them on, and we'll continue to work on that. Fort McMurray is certainly one of the areas, and Grande Prairie, as you know, is another area that's really growing at a rapid rate. I think they're pretty well prime to be able to do that. We'll just continue to work on that.

You talked about the Kelowna accord. Let me just talk about that. Just as you indicated – and First Nations and the Métis community and the Inuit also indicated this – we were disappointed that it wasn't mentioned in the budget. We are always concerned about the fact when we're dealing with probably the most marginal group of people. So what the First Nations and the Métis and all the aboriginal community tell us is that they do not want the federal government to renege on their responsibility as well. They don't want us to take on responsibilities that they feel are the federal government's. Of course, we want to make sure that we address some of their concerns because they are Albertans too.

So, as a result, we have actually put a lot of money in lots of different areas. Housing is one, the remote housing. The Minister – I'm sure you saw her budget the other day – spoke about some of the affordable housing projects. So when we look at those, those are the kinds of areas that we have been making sure we're involved in, and of course on the consultation and a number of other areas, whether it's a human resource strategy, to make sure that there is an aboriginal strategy; you know, all those areas. So we've been involved as much as we can from the Alberta perspective, but we also want to honour what the First Nations have told us, that the federal government have a fiduciary responsibility.

Bursary. I know that my colleague may want to speak a few minutes on some of these areas. He's very knowledgeable.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Snelgrove: I just wanted to know if we could revert to Introduction of Guests, but he's stayed here long enough now that he's not a guest.

The Chair: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Strang: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I've just got a couple of items I want to ask the hon. minister. If you refer to the aspect of your goal 3, what I'm wondering about is – when you go to your budget, I'm looking at line 3.0.1. As we're moving forward, you realize that we have lots of pressures in the north, and the big thing is transportation. We had a very great conference in High Level last month. I'm just wondering how we are going to keep this going from the point of view that we're looking only at \$785,000 to try and get things moving in the north. You know, that's our last frontier, and we have to make sure that we move forward on that, that we have the interconnectors. A lot of the roads need to be upgraded, and I'm just wondering what your department is doing on that so that we can work with the different communities.

The other thing I'm looking at is the Métis settlements governance, 4.0.1. I notice that we've moved down on that aspect too, and I'm just wondering where we're going on that. Is there a sunset clause on that?

Then if you could explain the aspect of 1.0.3 on the aboriginal affairs side. We're looking at \$4,879,000, and I just sort of want a bit more explanation on that. I'm sure that that's covered under goal 1: "Lead the management of significant Aboriginal issues requiring coordinated strategic response and partnerships."

5:00

The other thing is – I know your department doesn't look at this – remote housing. I want to thank the hon. minister and the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment for working on this with the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports because we're able to get some dollars and cents for the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation out of Grande Cache. As you realize, they were displaced from Jasper national park. They're working very well in the Grande Cache area with the different partnerships, but the housing is a big aspect. I'm just wondering how we're going to coordinate so that we can move forward on that aspect.

I guess that the other one is, as you realize, the nature in which we have the land deal with them. We have co-operatives and enterprises, and I'm just wondering how we can get some more autonomy there so that we can move ahead and do some more studying from the land issue so that we can have some outline plans, possibly using the hamlet status so that we can work with the MD of Greenview too.

If you could enlighten me on those, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to address a couple of the issues and the challenges that we do face in northern Alberta. As probably everybody knows, we have spent and paid a lot of attention to the need for professionals, especially in health care, whether it be doctors or whether it be nurses or physiotherapists. I suppose one of our greatest needs is the health care system, professionals in the health care system. But don't isolate it to that one category because we need individuals, we need professionals in all aspects, and the challenge is because of the isolation that is in northern Alberta.

That is why it is so necessary to have the bursaries that we do have in place right now. The bursary rate has improved from the 1974 level to 78 per cent. Of course, there's a lot of room for improvement, and we can't argue that. But we need to continue to

strive to develop a bursary system, one that is going to encourage people not only to come to northern Alberta but especially to come back to northern Alberta. If an individual was born in northern Alberta, they are more likely to come back and stay. We need to look at those individuals and encourage them to come back.

Mr. Chairman, I do want to talk about the roads as well, if I can. It is as important as communication when we talk about the roads. When we look at central Alberta and we look at the cities, I say that those roads are the lifelines for individuals not only to get around but to be able to communicate. In northern Alberta, as I mentioned before, the distance that we are challenged with makes it very difficult. We need to focus on major arteries. We need to focus on roads that will encompass energy or gas and oil to deal with the challenges we have of moving product.

Mr. Chairman, when we talk about Alberta and we talk about the northern Alberta development that takes place, we need to look more in depth at adding value. We need to add value to our products in Alberta but, I would say, especially in northern Alberta. We have our forest products. When we look at forest products and we look at adding value, we need to develop our pressboard plants and not only develop them to the stage where we have pressboard plants and ship them to other provinces or to other countries to further add value, but I think we need to do it here.

When we look at agriculture, there is no way that Alberta can survive on the sale of raw products. We need to develop and add value. We cannot compete against South America. We can't compete with Australia in a market where the cost of production is so much higher.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that in order to accomplish some of those goals, we definitely need to continue and enhance our bursary system. It is working very well. I believe that we need to try to add funds into that direction, look at different initiatives, and look at different incentives to bring youth back into northern Alberta. It is very important when we look at northern Alberta communities.

I want to use an example of some of the municipalities right now that are looking at trying to encourage administrators to come back into their communities. They are looking at ways of working with Children's Services and having the Youth Advisory Panel make presentations to municipal councils on how we can encourage youth to come back into rural Alberta. It is a key to our existence. We will never be able to survive if we continue to try to centralize our services and our delivery of services. We need the youth to come back not only for the energy and the gas employment opportunities but for all opportunities.

Mr. Chairman, again, I want to say that the bursary program has worked and is doing a tremendous job. As I said before, I would hope that we could enhance that part of our investment. I just want to thank you for the opportunity to stand up and, you know, explain a little bit about the bursaries and the importance of them.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. I'd just like to address a couple of comments to the minister, and they're observations that I've made in southern Alberta. One of the things that the hon. member with northern development spoke about were bursaries and also daycare. To me, I see that as a huge issue because I really believe that – particularly with what I see around my area in Lethbridge. I do see many of the young native women obviously having their children much earlier than the average. Their further education is very, very difficult because they don't have proper daycare. When I say proper

daycare, although you've said that you don't deliver programs, I think what I would like to see is some kind of a co-ordinated ability for the elder women in our community to be able to create a cultural daycare, so to speak, for some of these young children, to free up the younger teenage moms and even the young 20s moms to be able to go back to school because we are missing out on a huge potential with our native women.

I would just like to share those observations. You can make a comment or otherwise; I'd just like to share that observation.

5:10

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Chairman, I know that I've just got a few minutes. First of all, I'd like to say thank you to everyone who asked questions. If I didn't address your concerns, we'll certainly put it in writing so that you have the information before you. I've appreciated the recommendations that have come, but I also would like to see some other suggestions like the role model issue. I don't know if we've addressed all that. But if you have any ideas, please let me know.

The Member for West Yellowhead has huge concerns when it comes to his AWN and certainly pushed for housing.

So, Mr. Chairman, I want to say thank you again to everyone.

Mr. Backs: Just to mention some role models that were great leaders, I think, in this Assembly. Many members would agree. Peter Lougheed was a member of Métis extraction who was a great leader in this Assembly; Nick Taylor, the Leader of the Opposition, was also a Métis leader; and, you know, other good role models in our Assembly. There are many, actually, that have excelled in here.

There are a couple of items. I would just perhaps request a written answer on that bursary, you know, some of the specifics to my question. I won't go through them again.

The nontrades area is something I didn't touch on. That's something that was perhaps highlighted in a newspaper article today, I believe it was, in the *Edmonton Journal*, about the lack of equipment operators, buggy skimmers, Cat skimmers, and such.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, 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 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

Agreed to:

Expense and Equipment/Inventory Purchases \$34,003,000

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee rise and report the estimates of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Pastoor: 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.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: expense and equipment/inventory purchases, \$34,003,000.

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

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Acting Government House Leader.

Mrs. McClellan: That scares me when you say that.

Mr. Speaker, I think it was a good afternoon of work. I would move that we call it 5:30 and the House adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening, when it would commence in Committee of Supply.

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

