

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, August 29, 2006**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 06/08/29

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce two sets of guests. I'll ask them to stand as I mention their name: Lorna Chandler from Black Diamond and her children Josh Chandler, who is 8, and Jada Chandler, 4, the widow and children of a farm worker killed in June of this year; Patricia Williams, her sister, and her daughter Raylean Williams and grandma Rita Williams. With them are Darlene Dunlop and Eric Musekamp from the farm workers union of Alberta. Let's give them the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Secondly, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly Kathryn Andrusky, president of the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta, and Sarah Thomas of the Professional Association of Residents of Alberta. They're concerned about attracting more doctors to Alberta through the promised Alberta Learning approval of debt deferral and interest-free status till the end of residency. Let's give them a warm welcome.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this esteemed Assembly two sets of introductions. The first one is Jacquie Lycka, an 18-year-old friend who is my STEP student at the Edmonton-McClung constituency office. Jacquie is attending Grant MacEwan in the fall, majoring in political science for her BA, and we're hoping that she's being groomed to be the next Liberal MLA for Edmonton-McClung. She has absolutely loved working in the constituency office, and today she is here watching me put on my other hat as a legislator. I hope she learns, and I hope she enjoys her stay. I would invite her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The second introduction, Mr. Speaker, is my sister Amina Elsalhy, who is just back from her honeymoon, and she is accompanied by her husband, Moamen Nomeir. Again, they're watching me do my work as an honoured member of this esteemed Assembly. Today, incidentally, is Moamen's birthday, so I wish him a happy birthday. I would invite all our colleagues here to give them the traditional warm welcome.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As is so often the case at this time of year, late summer brings a number of comings and goings in the caucus office of the Official Opposition. I would like to make some introductions today, if I could, the first

being Jodie Gauthier, who is a research analyst with the Alberta Liberal caucus and the newest member of our team. Jodie was born and raised in High Prairie, Alberta, and recently completed a combined honours degree in political science and women's studies at the University of Alberta. Jodie would like to add that she supports same-sex marriage and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in general.

John Hanley has been a tremendous addition to our administrative team this summer as a correspondence assistant. John is a fourth-year political student at the U of A and will be completing his bachelor of arts degree this fall. He has worked previously as a radio broadcaster, a computer programmer, and a writer. John is excited about making his contribution to Alberta's democratic system by working in the Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, he's leaving us on Friday to go back to school, so we would like to thank him and wish him continued success in the future.

Sarah FitzGibbon joined us this summer as part of our administrative team. She has done a phenomenal job and has been instrumental in cataloguing and reorganizing our library. Sarah will be starting her first semester at the University of Alberta in September in the sciences and hopes to continue on to medicine in the future. She is a bright young woman, Mr. Speaker, and we're sure that she will achieve great things.

Finally, Christel Hyshka has been with us as a STEP student, and she's done fabulous work supporting our outreach program. Christel completed her undergraduate degree at the U of A and is now off to Carleton University in Ottawa to begin her master's degree in Canadian politics. Christel plans to return to Alberta to work in the public sector and is particularly interested in issues surrounding democracy and civic engagement. She will be leaving us tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, and we would like to thank her as well and wish her every success.

I would ask all four of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Del Marlow. Del is the program manager with Elizabeth House in the Alberta Avenue neighbourhood of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Del has worked in Edmonton's nonprofit sector for 14 years and has been with E4C's Elizabeth House facility for women in transition from homelessness for two and a half years. Elizabeth House provides a warm and safe home environment for women making the next step from emergency housing to independent living. Elizabeth House and E4C recently held a turn up the light on homelessness community event to break down some of the myths about homelessness and to foster relationships with the general community. Del Marlow is seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to this Assembly two guests today: Samantha Power and Andrea Enes. Samantha was elected president of the University of Alberta Students' Union for this year. She has been a tireless advocate for students over a number of years and is here today to encourage the government to make postsecondary education a real priority.

Andrea Enes was recently hired by the students' union as the external officer for the advocacy department. Andrea has also been

involved in the community on a number of fronts, including a number of social justice causes.

I would now ask both of them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce three students from the University of Alberta who are here to observe the goings-on in the House this afternoon and also to advocate for reduced debt loads for students in postsecondary education. They are – and if you would rise as I call your name, please – David Cournoyer, VP external for the University of Alberta Students' Union and chair this year of the Council of Alberta University Students, CAUS; Jessica King, U of A political science student and campus campaigns co-ordinator for the U of A Students' Union advocacy department; and Dane Bullerwell, a first-year U of A law student. If you could all please give them the warm traditional welcome of the House.

Thank you.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Planning for Growth Pressures

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta cities and towns are facing massive growth pressures. You know, quite frankly, without a plan to deal with the challenges to infrastructure, schools, hospitals, and community services, our communities will be left wondering where the Alberta advantage went. Yesterday in this House the Minister of Human Resources and Employment stated that only Liberals "would start thinking what may happen down the road." Precisely. To the Premier: does the Premier have any vision whatsoever or, indeed, even any interest in what kind of Alberta our children will inherit, or in his world is it just about he who dies with the most toys wins?

1:40

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, the allegation that this government has no plan to meet massive growth pressures is blarney. It is hocus-pocus. It is Liberal hocus-pocus. The challenge, as always, is finding a balance. We are well aware of the pressures in the Wood Buffalo region and other regions of this province where phenomenal growth is taking place. At the same time, we don't want to negatively impact the livelihood of thousands of people, literally thousands upon thousands who are directly or indirectly employed by the oil industry, that would be affected by the Liberals interfering in the market.

Now, we will consult with Albertans and stakeholders about oil sands development this fall. As a matter of fact, there is a process and a stakeholders committee set up to do precisely that. In addition, we have formed an oil sands ministerial committee to examine everything from infrastructure requirements to socioeconomic pressures in the areas involved, and that committee will report back to government before the end of the year. The chair of the committee is the hon. Justice minister, and he may want to supplement.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All that consulting doesn't sound like there's a plan yet.

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: given that previous governments in Alberta had legislation in place to deal with extraordinary urban growth pressures in boom times, will the minister commit to bringing back that legislation, that was repealed in 1994 when the existing Municipal Government Act was brought in?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, when the existing Municipal Government Act was brought in, it replaced a number of pieces of legislation, and the legislation the member refers to was one of them. That being said, it doesn't mean that because the act is no longer there, the municipalities do not have the ability to deal with issues under the existing legislation. So the answer to the question is no.

Mr. Taylor: Well, having the ability to deal with it is something that we can't readily see any evidence of these days.

Again to the minister: given that counties and MDs often have the tax base, the money, and cities and towns have the population and the infrastructure pressures, the expenses, how does the minister propose to resolve this fiscal imbalance? Or should, for instance, Cold Lake just annex half the MD of Bonnyville in an effort to solve its problems?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, it's very timely that the member would ask that question because tomorrow afternoon I will again be welcoming to the Legislature members of the Minister's Council on Municipal Sustainability as we continue our ongoing dialogue to deal with just exactly what the member refers to.

Municipalities largely are dependent upon an inelastic form of taxation: property tax. That's very good in slow times; it seems not to be as effective in boom times. On the other hand, the province has a very elastic form of tax revenue, that provides good sources of revenue in times like we are in now, but frankly, Mr. Speaker, when the economic boom takes a downturn, our revenue can literally go to zero from a significant number. So the minister's council is exploring ways that we can look at what the responsibilities of municipalities are and what the opportunities are for them to garner revenue. Then we'll determine how we should distribute those various revenue alternatives.

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

Affordable Housing

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lots of talk. We're still waiting for the action.

Despite this government's unshakable faith in the ability of the market to solve every problem known to humankind, the market has clearly failed to resolve the affordable housing crisis in Alberta. In fact, the government's hands-off approach has exacerbated the problem, with skyrocketing rents and a near zero inventory of reasonably priced housing. My first question is to the Premier. What is this government going to do, in real terms for real people, to build affordable housing or cause it to be built? The market isn't doing it on its own, and it's hard to be patient when you're living in a trailer.

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as with all matters affecting growth, we see this as a challenge, and striking the right balance is the key. The hon. member is right; we don't want to interfere in the marketplace. But we do understand the severity of the problem.

Perhaps the minister responsible for housing might want to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, we have been planning through this ministry for about four years now along with the federal government. Working with our counterparts, we have the Canada affordable housing program, which I've mentioned to you before. Over the past four years we have put \$100 million from Alberta, \$100 million from the federal government – \$200 million, \$50 million per year – developed 3100 units, houses, in the past four years. We are continuing it this year with another \$44 million. And that's just the housing component.

An Hon. Member: It's not working.

Mrs. Fritz: It is so working, and well.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, we're not keeping up with the demand. To the Minister of Government Services: does the minister consider that any increase in rent is fair and reasonable regardless of whether it's 3 per cent, 30 per cent, 300 per cent? At what point do market-driven rent increases become rent gouging?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the Fair Trading Act we do watch this very, very carefully to make sure that the rents can only be increased twice a year.

Further to the question that the hon. member had previously, saying that private enterprise is not stepping up, that's absolutely wrong: 49,000 units are being built this year by the private sector here in Alberta.

Mr. Taylor: How many of them are priced over \$400,000?

To the Minister of Advanced Education: has the minister begun to calculate how much the high cost of off-campus housing is going to add to students' debt loads when they return to school next week?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much. As you know, we are looking at the entire affordability framework with respect to postsecondary, not just tuition, which happens to be sort of the iceberg. It's what lies below the water that seems to cost an awful lot. Housing and transportation, particularly for those who, in fact, have to move away from rural Alberta to find housing in our urban centres, is a big problem. We are looking for new solutions, and within the next few weeks I'm sure that the hon. member will be pleased with what we come up with.

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

Siting of Calgary Halfway House

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Halfway houses are a necessary part of the justice system. They facilitate the release of paroled prisoners back into the community. Without halfway houses prisoners would simply be released into communities with no controls or treatments after parole. This is obviously not in the interests of public safety. Our Solicitor General, our top cop, seems to believe: "Fine. Build your halfway house, just not in my backyard. This is someone else's problem." My question is to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security. Given that the minister has made public statements threatening to withhold funding

from an agency if they proceed to put a halfway house in his riding, is it the minister's policy, is it the government's policy to negotiate through intimidation?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is wrong. The issue that we have here is a halfway house. The John Howard Society does provide a very good service to offenders that are released. The issue that we have – and it just happens to be in my riding – is the fact that we're going to have pedophiles that are two blocks from junior high schools and elementary schools. The issue isn't NIMBY, not in my back yard. The issue is: what should be the proximity of a school, an elementary school, where we have kids that have English as their second language, kids that are most vulnerable in our society that are going to have to walk right by and right in front of this facility on their way to school, knowing that there are pedophiles inside that would be very happy to sexually assault those kids? We're here and this government is here to protect the children in this province. We'll do what we have to, and it doesn't matter what riding it's in, if it's my riding or Edmonton-Glenora.

1:50

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, the pedophile issue is not the issue here. Has the minister consulted the research? Across Canada such halfway houses do not contribute to an increase in crime and do not contribute to a decrease in property values.

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, there have been studies that have been done on halfway houses. There has been, in fact, a study on one halfway house that was in the Glamorgan area, in the southwest portion of Calgary, where the crime rate was noticeably higher than in other sectors of the city of Calgary. So I'm not sure where the member is getting some of his information. But I can assure you of this: it doesn't matter in which riding this would happen, if it was in Edmonton-Glenora or in Edmonton-Castle Downs. It's the issue of where we're going to be placing these and the issue of ensuring the safety of residents. I can tell you this: the safety of our kids is uppermost in this government's mind, and we're going to pursue that. We'll assist the John Howard Society in looking for a new location that isn't two blocks from an elementary school.

Dr. B. Miller: Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary question is this: is the minister willing to work with the John Howard Society and help them out? Where is the evidence that he is willing to help them find a suitable location? If not in his riding, what riding?

Mr. Cenaiko: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have been in touch with both the provincial association and the association in Calgary in looking at other options for them. I have also worked with the two communities that are very affected by this issue, the community of Scarboro and the community of Sunalta, and will continue to work with them. The John Howard Society has gone forward in their development application. It's before city council right now. There has been an appeal by the community, and there will be further appeals as well. The communities have hired a lawyer because they don't want this facility in their community. There are four other agencies in this community that are providing services of that similar type. The communities are saying: "We don't need one more in our community. We have four already. Is there not another location in the city of Calgary or outside the city of Calgary or in another community where the John Howard Society can provide this same service?"

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View.

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta lags behind other jurisdictions which require public disclosure of all donations in a leadership contest for a registered political party. Tory leadership hopefuls are raising and spending millions of dollars, much of it coming, no doubt, from big business. Given that the winner of this race will automatically be the Premier of Alberta at least until the next election, it is unacceptable that the public is being kept in the dark about who is paying the piper. To the Deputy Premier: will the government take action to ensure that all donations to the Tory leadership candidates are publicly disclosed, and if not, why not?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. members, our rules clearly – clearly – prohibit questions dealing with political party matters being raised in the Assembly, and the question in particular asks the government to deal with the activities of a political party. That question is not in order, hon. member, under our rules.

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

(continued)

Mr. Mason: This is a matter of government policy and very important public policy. It's been legislated in other jurisdictions in this country. So I will ask the Deputy Premier if this government is prepared to table legislation in this House to regulate the financing of leadership campaigns, including but not limited to the current race for the Progressive Conservative Party.

The Speaker: The question is a bit broader in the sense that it includes everything, and it has nothing to do with one particular party. If the hon. Deputy Premier wants to, proceed, please.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer, of course, in this province is an officer of the Legislature, but frankly I think that the question in this area would be more appropriately directed to our Minister of Justice.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My memory is that we do in fact have a legislative committee which addresses issues surrounding, in general terms, elections and election financing and whatnot. It's an all-party committee. I know that there are members of the Liberal opposition on that committee, and indeed my memory is that one of the members from the ND third party is on that committee.

The Chief Electoral Officer after the last election and, indeed, after all of the elections since our Premier became Premier of this province has prepared reports that have gone to that particular committee, including recommendations with respect to amendments to the Election Act and to the election financing act. There has been a discussion with respect to those matters after each of those three elections, and indeed the material has gone before that committee in this particular session.

Now, I know as a matter of fact that there have been recommendations made, and I know that there has been no discussion put forward by the ND or by the Official Opposition with respect to this particular matter. From my perspective, that is the appropriate place to raise that. There is a legislative committee, and to date there has

been absolutely no interest expressed by this member, his party, or any other party with respect to this issue.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When will this government take responsibility to introduce legislation in this House, where it should be discussed, that places limits on the enormous campaign contributions that the Conservative candidates are receiving? When will this government deal with the issue?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions about Political Party Activity

The Speaker: Hon. member, the second question dealt with everything. The third question now goes back to dealing with one particular political party. I ruled the first question out of order. I'm going to rule the third question out of order.

We're now going to go to the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish the opposition had been as interested in discussion yesterday. [interjections]

The Speaker: I recognized the hon. Member for Foothills-Rocky View. Please proceed.

Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is one of the few provinces in Canada that does not include farm workers under provincial labour law. In June in Foothills-Rocky View we lost an important member of the community in Black Diamond, Mr. Kevan Chandler, in a farm accident. Many of my constituents and the friends and family of Kevan Chandler are wondering why Alberta does not include farm workers under our labour law. Also, I know that my friend and colleague from Wetaskiwin-Camrose has had this issue raised with him. My first question is to the minister of human resources. Why are farm workers not covered in Alberta?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question because, no doubt, any time there is a fatality in any industry in Alberta, we are concerned. Our target is not to have any fatalities at all. I understand from Alberta Agriculture that the majority of farms in Alberta continue to be family farms, and with families living and working together, they require unique operational needs. Of course, you know that that whole industry is faced with so many challenges.

Farm workers do have some coverage under the Employment Standards Code. They are covered for payment of wages, termination notices, and parental leave. Farmers are among the over 200 industry groups which may voluntarily purchase workers' compensation coverage, Mr. Speaker. That is, of course, available. We do have the cheapest workers' compensation rates in the country. Workers in all sectors are encouraged to find out what injury insurance coverage is provided through their employers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. My next question is for the Acting Minister of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What steps is the government taking to make farm workers safer?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody can be complacent when it comes to human life, and there's no question that we take

farm safety very seriously. Many of us, including this member, live with our families on farms and face this issue every day. Our ultimate goal is to prevent all accidents and fatalities on farms in Alberta. We are doing a lot of work through adopting best practices, identifying hazards, managing risk, those things.

There's an exceptional CD called *Farm Safety: It's No Accident!* that is available. It's a free training tool. It includes checklists and the dos and don'ts of farm safety. We have farm workers that participate in trade shows where there are examples.

2:00

One of the best examples that I've personally seen work, Mr. Speaker, was the program that worked with schoolchildren. If any of you that live on a farm have been involved with this, when your child has been through that program, they come home and have been instructed to very clearly and very respectfully inform parents where there are risks, whether it's around power lines or moving machinery, and so on.

It is a tragedy in any industry when there is an accident, especially one that takes a life.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Morton: Thank you. My last question is for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Are there any plans in your ministry to change the legislation to include farm workers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, that's a very important and a very good question. Of course, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Alberta Human Resources and Employment will continue to work together in this area and monitor the situation very closely and, of course, make the necessary changes to improve the system as required.

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

Electricity Pricing

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Premier's legacy now to Albertans is electricity prices that soar to 99 cents per kilowatt and the constant threat of rolling blackouts. The market as designed by this government is not driving down the price of electricity in Alberta, as this Premier promised. It's another broken promise. My first question is to the Premier. Given that yesterday in this House the Premier stated that he would not tamper with the free market, why is this government continuing to subsidize electricity generation in the oil sands to the tune of at least \$162 million in the year 2005 alone?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, I fail to see where we are subsidizing production in the oil sands at any level. Now, there is a case where a company or perhaps one or two companies or maybe three are using their own gas to create steam to stimulate wells or operations to extract the oil from the sands, but it is their gas.

An Hon. Member: No. It's our gas.

Mr. Klein: No. It's their gas. It's gas over bitumen. Now, they either sell that gas, or they use that gas. Either way it's not free.

Mr. MacDonald: Again to the Premier: where is all the extra generation capacity for electricity that the Premier constantly brags about when yesterday the wholesale electricity price was 99 cents per kilowatt, and generators were forced to produce at their maximum continuous rating to prevent another blackout?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, as the opposition has pointed out time and time again, it is a tremendously fast-growing population, and thank God we had energy deregulation in the generation business only, only in the generation, notwithstanding the falsehoods being spread by the Liberals relative to deregulation on the retail side. [interjection] Right. It is on the generation of electricity only.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that through deregulation the capacity of the generation plants has been increased substantially to the point where we have, notwithstanding some breakdowns and some unforeseen problems, 3,000 additional megawatts of power on stream.

Mr. MacDonald: And they weren't there yesterday whenever they were needed.

Again to the Premier: why does this government force consumers to pay the full shot for all transmission upgrades and expansions while the province subsidizes the price of fuel gas for generators of electricity in the oil sands before they sell it to the open market, as designed by this government in this province?

Mr. Klein: Mr. Speaker, that is not true.

Mr. MacDonald: It is true.

Mr. Klein: It is not true.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Land Title Wait Times

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The unprecedented growth of Alberta's hot economy continues to lead the nation. One area that has been significantly affected by this growth is the long wait times at land titles offices. My questions today are for the Minister of Government Services. Can the minister tell us what actions are being taken to address registration volumes and resulting turnaround times at land titles?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is quite right. You know, we are experiencing longer delays than we would like. There has been such a huge increase in the volume at registry offices. I think our 109 officers are doing about 5,000 land transactions a day – a day. That's unbelievable. So last year we added new staff. This year we're adding new staff. It takes about six months to take a paralegal out of a postsecondary institution, get them trained, and get them into our workforce to produce. Our staff are working Monday nights, Tuesday nights, Wednesday nights, Thursday nights, and Saturdays. We have quite a commitment from the Government Services staff to address the backlog.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister then: can he tell this Assembly what the average Albertan can maybe do

on our side of the ledger to reduce the long wait times for land titles registration?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, expectations are high here in Alberta. When you make the largest investment of your life that a couple can – I know that when my wife and I bought our first home, that was our largest investment, but we gave ourselves time to make sure that we had a mortgage lined up ahead of time, we made sure that we had, you know, the paperwork done properly, and we made sure that it was our responsibility to give ourselves the proper time and have the lawyers that represented us hand in the proper paperwork to the land titles office so that we had this done as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question for the same minister: is it true that long delays such as we are currently experiencing mean that people aren't able to get into their homes when they planned and are faced with paying fines or excessive interest payments due to government delays?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate the comments that I made earlier. You know, to go and spend \$200,000, \$250,000 on a home and expect that in two weeks you're going to be in it is unrealistic. You have to take some personal responsibility and make sure that you allow yourself sufficient time to buy a home with the right paperwork done.

To the member across: there is a no-cost service administered by the Law Society of Alberta that allows folks that are dealing with buying a home to have a lender release their mortgage money before the title is registered. So there is that service. They have to explain that to their lawyer acting on behalf of them. But I tell the public out there: please give yourself three weeks' time to buy a home. That's your largest purchase of your whole life that you'll make. Consider that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

2:10 Farm Worker Exemptions from Labour Legislation (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On June 18, 2006, Kevan Chandler was killed in a farm accident that was entirely predictable and preventable. Agriculture is a hazardous industry, with 20 deaths and 1,353 reported injuries in 2005. Still this government insists that farm workers just need more CDs and pamphlets. They've deliberately excluded these employees from occupational health and safety legislation in this province. To the minister of human resources: in front of the widow can you tell us what this government is prepared to do to change this situation?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, a similar question was just asked earlier this afternoon. It is, of course, very unfortunate that any accident would happen, not only on a farm but in the whole sector out there in Alberta. Of course, our target in Alberta is to ensure that there are no fatalities, and you can be assured and I can assure the individual listening that we will do everything we can. I made a commitment earlier this afternoon that I will be working very closely with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to review the situation, to monitor the situation, and make the necessary changes that are required to improve the system, keeping in mind that

agriculture today is challenged with many difficulties because it's a difficult industry.

Dr. Swann: It's five years of monitoring, Mr. Speaker.

Is this minister saying that occupational health and safety regulations and legislation help every other occupation except farm workers? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Cardinal: No, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there are a number of industries in agriculture now that are covered under occupational health and safety. That includes the food processing plants, mushroom farms, greenhouses, nurseries, sod farms, and landscaping areas. Those are already covered under occupational health and safety. All I'm saying is that we'll review that between the two ministries and, of course, possibly involving the agriculture industry out there because they will be impacted by any change that is made. Hopefully, whatever we do will eliminate any fatality in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of human resources: with the proliferation of large-scale factory farms, will you at least institute basic minimum standards for workers?

Mr. Cardinal: Mr. Speaker, of course, we will review all sectors in this area, as I said before, and make the necessary changes that are required, keeping in mind that agriculture is one of the backbones of rural Alberta. Many communities in rural Alberta depend on agriculture for their survival. Therefore, whatever change we make has to be the right change, keeping the balance, keeping in mind again our target of zero fatalities in Alberta.

Degree Granting Approval

Dr. Brown: Mr. Speaker, next month students will be enrolling in new bachelor degree programs at Grant MacEwan College, while Mount Royal College is also applying for further degree-granting programs. There have been concerns raised that these new degrees will not be recognized as being of the same quality as university degrees. My questions are for the Minister of Advanced Education. What is the minister doing to ensure that any new degree programs granted at MacEwan and Mount Royal College will maintain the high standards of the other university degrees being granted in the province of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much. It's a very important question, and I'm sure that the students in the gallery will be listening for the answer. Our government is committed to ensuring that quality education is provided to all students at our post-secondary institutions. That's why in 2004 we established an assurance mechanism to ensure that the new degree programs are of the highest quality, and that's what the Alberta Quality Council in fact does.

The issue that you may be referring to here with respect to Grant MacEwan is really not an issue of quality but an issue of whether or not Grant MacEwan is part of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, which is the AUCC. Now, Queen's University had said that they would not recognize degrees from institutions that were not part of the AUCC. So we are taking steps in terms of regulation to make sure that our institutions can in fact qualify for the AUCC.

I have confidence in the rigours and the processes that the Quality Council has undertaken to ensure that every student will have their degrees recognized by other institutions.

Dr. Brown: A supplemental question for the same minister: can the minister assure Albertans that graduates in these programs will have their degrees recognized and that they won't be penalized when they go to apply for graduate school as other Alberta graduates do?

Mr. Herard: I think that the member has hit the nail on the head. That's really the million dollar question. Now, I don't know that I can stand here and guarantee what others will do in other jurisdictions, but certainly here in Alberta our public universities are on board with the council's decisions and will accept new degrees from MacEwan and other public colleges. The council is committed to ensuring the national and international recognition of Alberta degrees and works closely with other provinces in quality initiatives. It has established an outstanding reputation nationally for the work it does.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise whether he can assure the House that the Campus Alberta Quality Council has the academic and public credibility to judge the quality of these new degree programs?

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, many of the factors that the Quality Council looks at are things such as academic policy standards, faculty qualifications, physical resources, and things like libraries and laboratories. The most important thing, though, is that it is all a peer-reviewed process. The members of the council use their extensive knowledge of postsecondary education as well as the advice of external experts to make a thorough assessment of degree proposals.

Now, you may remember that just a couple of days ago I introduced here in this House Dr. Ron Bond, who is the chair of the committee. These people have impeccable qualifications. When I looked at his qualifications, I couldn't believe everything that he has published in his 33-year career. His reputation is on the line and so are the other members' on that Quality Council. I would invite you to look at their credentials, and you'll see that we use nothing but the highest credentials.

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

Tuition Fee Policy

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last 16 months we have heard all kinds of grandiose statements from this government on tuition policy, none of which have materialized. In 2005 the Premier promised that Albertans would have the most affordable tuition policy in the country, but the reality is that we have the country's second-highest tuition fees. With the odious Bill 40 becoming law, we've moved tuition fee policy into regulation, out of public scrutiny, and behind the closed doors of the secret deliberations of cabinet room. We are now left with not only broken promises but also secrecy. My questions are to the Minister of Advanced Education. Will he bring tuition fee policy back into the Legislature as the Council of Alberta University Students and the Alberta NDP opposition have asked, allow this Assembly to debate it, and give Albertans democratic oversight over this, one of the most important public policies?

Mr. Herard: Well, I think the hon. member answered his own question. He did say that Bill 40 passed, which essentially set out tuition policy for regulation. He was also invited to participate throughout the summer along with members of ACTISEC and CAUS to ensure that we get it right with respect to tuition policy. I don't know for sure if I've heard from him. I was hoping to get some pearls of wisdom from him with respect to that.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that when you have tuition policy in regulation, you have the opportunity to have continuous improvement instead of enshrining something in legislation that doesn't change for 10 or 12 years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have clear messages for the minister right here.

My next question to him: given that this September students face yet another tuition increase masked by a band-aid rebate, why won't this minister reveal his secret tuition fee policy to this Assembly now, during this sitting?

2:20

Mr. Herard: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is just simply a couple of weeks too early. We are currently reviewing all of the input. As I said, I'm not sure that he did respond, nor am I sure that my critic from the Liberal opposition responded, but we are looking at all of the responses to bring forward a tuition policy. As a matter of fact, tomorrow I'll be meeting with the council of presidents and chairs to make sure that everybody is on board with respect to tuition policy. But I'll do more than that. I will challenge them to become more efficient and create more spaces with the physical infrastructure that they have now.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary to the minister. It's a piece of good advice for him. Given that the summer students on average earned less than \$1,400 a month while tuition fees alone in this province now are close to \$5,200, will this minister adopt the policy advocated by all kinds of student groups and supported by the Alberta NDP opposition to roll back tuition fees to the 1999-2000 level and then link any annual increases to no more than CPI?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Herard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We went partway on that. We decided to keep the tuition level as it currently is. We paid \$87 million to ensure that there was no tuition fee increase for last year and this year. Next year it will be based on that tuition fee plus a CPI indicator. So we've gone partway there.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think we live in a new world. Employers who sit on the sidelines and wait for institutions to produce well-educated and motivated employees are going to be competing for the bottom of the barrel, but those who participate in the journey of postsecondary from the very first year will get the cream of the crop.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, followed by the hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Hospital Bed Capacity in Calgary

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgarians suffer daily from former Finance minister Jim Dinning's disastrous decision, sup-

ported by Calgary Conservative MLAs, to close half of Calgary's hospitals. The folly continues as the new, state-of-the-art Calgary Children's hospital has only 21 more beds and will not meet the needs of Calgary's growing population. Compounding the ongoing distress is the continuing series of delays in constructing the southeast hospital. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the predictable population increases, the increasing number of births, and the need to correct Dinning's shortsighted decisions, why weren't more beds added?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, clearly I have a number of points that I'd like to raise. First of all, when Chairman David Tuer of the Calgary health region speaks about beds, he speaks about effective beds. The beds in the currently used Children's hospital are not always effective. Children come in with communicable diseases, so frequently two or three beds are actually sterilized, unable to be used because only one bed can be used because the child has to be isolated. This new hospital, contrary to the number of 80, has 133 beds, 135 when fully operational, and has 60 per cent more in its emergency capacity.

Mr. Speaker, the Children's hospital was built for 25,000 emergency department visits. It usually got about 41,000 visits. This new facility will accommodate 60,000 visits, and it will enable us to do more of the kinds of supports for families who need that support in their homes and in other facilities.

One other point, Mr. Speaker. If you drive around Calgary, which I have done, to look at what Calgary is doing, you see construction on almost every site. There is a criticism that we haven't advanced on the southeast side, but take a look at the Sheldon Chumir, take a look at the work being done on the Rockyview, take a look at the work being done on the Peter Lougheed, and look at the state-of-the-art Children's hospital, which everybody is proud of.

Mr. Chase: Yes, Calgarians are spending a lot of time looking at hospitals instead of being served by them.

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. Was that the question? We don't have preambles, remember.

Mr. Chase: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What plans does the minister have to add the additional capacity that Calgary families require?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, by the year 2011 we will have 700 more beds in Calgary available, up and running, to add to the bed capacity. We approved last August \$1.4 billion. Today across Alberta there is about \$3.5 billion being spent or on the books, planning and work being done, to add beds and other community-centred health capacity.

Mr. Speaker, Calgary alone had an injection of an additional \$670 million last year, and they are actively not only planning for an expanded population but building on their primary care centres. I think the doubling up of dollars for the ARP plans, for academic plans for physicians, will help us build our medical capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: how many more code burgundy delayed, anxiety-filled trips to understaffed, stressed emergency facilities will Calgarians be forced to endure before the southeast hospital is finally operational?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, from experience I can tell you that one facility in one part of the community won't necessarily alleviate

all of the problems in another part of the community. We have got a situation where we're trying always to make sure that we're serving just in time for emergencies. That's part of why I mention the primary care centres. I think that rather than a complaint about this city, that's had 1,200 more visits this year over last year – it will have a quarter of a million visits in total based on last year's statistics in emergency departments in Calgary – I think this Legislative Assembly would do well to congratulate the good men and women that are working hard to handle this excess capacity in this city.

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

Home Inspections

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing of more and more instances of Albertans buying homes, arranging for a home inspection, and then moving in only to find that the inspector overlooked serious problems they must then deal with. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. What is your ministry doing to protect buyers against unscrupulous and unqualified home inspectors?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that there is currently no regulation of home inspection businesses here in Alberta. However, the Alberta Fair Trading Act would apply if a home inspector were to misrepresent their services or qualifications. We are working with the Alberta chapter of the Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors to find an effective and economical way of regulating the needs of the home-buying public. My ministry established just last month an advisory committee to advise me on educational and operational standards as well as licensing requirements. This committee includes representatives from the home inspection and real estate industries, nonprofit organizations, consumers, and government people. Once a potential model is identified, I make a commitment that we will consult Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental to the same minister. In Alberta's heated economy to save time and expense many Albertans are purchasing homes without first arranging for a home inspection by a home inspector. Is there any recourse available to someone who purchased a home without a prior inspection and is now faced with costly repairs or possibly replacement?

Mr. VanderBurg: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's like I talked about in an earlier question: it's buyer beware. The public out there making this largest purchase of their lives needs to take time to get the facts, to make sure that they hire a proper inspector, one that's recommended by the Real Estate Association, by the municipality. Obviously, you know, the prospective homebuyer needs to discuss this with their real estate agent and their lawyer. So I'm asking the public out there to take the time to do this properly.

head: 2:30

Statement by the Speaker

Alberta Association of Former MLAs

The Speaker: Hon. members, shortly I'll call upon the first of six to participate, but a little historical vignette for today.

On June 1, 2006, proclamation was given to the Alberta Association of Former MLAs Act. The act became another first for the Alberta Legislative Assembly. The act deems that the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is the honorary president of the association and mandates that his first responsibility is to appoint seven former members who shall constitute the first board of directors. Today I have done such.

After a three-month consultation with former MLAs and several separate requests for former members to advise me of their interest, I am pleased to advise that the following former members will serve as the first board. Fred Bradley represented the constituency of Pincher Creek-Crowsnest and served in the Assembly from 1975 to 1993 as a Progressive Conservative member. Walter Alexander Buck served as the MLA for Clover Bar from 1967 to 1989 as a Social Credit member. Ed Gibbons served from 1997 to 2001 as the Liberal member for Edmonton-Manning. Karen Leibovici served from 1993 to 2001 as the Liberal member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. Ian McClelland represented Edmonton-Rutherford as a Progressive Conservative member from 2001 to 2004. Don Tannas served from 1989 to 2004 as the Progressive Conservative member for Highwood. Julius Yankowsky served from 1993 to 2004 and represented Edmonton-Beverly-Belmont first as a Liberal, then a Progressive Conservative and Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview as a Progressive Conservative.

This board will be invited to its first meeting shortly and will be asked to determine its first list of officers and determine the date of the association's first annual meeting. The Alberta Association of Former MLAs must not by law pursue its objects for any partisan political purpose and was established as a nonprofit body corporate. Thank you.

head:

Members' Statements

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

Baseball Canada Cup

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. August 17 through 20 saw the Baseball Canada Cup held in the city of Medicine Hat. This is a tournament for youth aged 17 and under, and the quality of baseball played during this event is of the highest calibre. I was pleased to have an opportunity to attend this year's competition and was very impressed by the proficiency with which these youth play the game. The fact that there were approximately 20 scouts from various major league teams watching these young players indicates just how good the quality of baseball being played was.

Mr. Speaker, sports teach Alberta's youth a great deal about working as a team, healthy competition, and sportsmanship. Being involved in sports also teaches young Albertans the value of working hard, of dedicating oneself to an endeavour in order to be successful. Finally, participating in sports impresses upon our youth the importance of an active lifestyle in order to remain healthy now and in the future. The individuals who participated in the Baseball Canada Cup certainly demonstrated these attributes throughout the tournament. Each one of them worked hard the entire season to support their team and to assist them in playing the best ball they could during this important tournament.

Mr. Speaker, every province was represented at this tournament by a team, and I would like to congratulate them all on a job well done. Although our own Alberta team did not win the championship and Ontario took home the honours of being the number one team, the quality of ball played was excellent and it was a very entertaining competition for the spectators who were there to take it in. I would like to congratulate all the teams on their efforts, and I would

like to thank all of the volunteers in Medicine Hat who helped make this tournament possible.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mountain Pine Beetle

Mr. Strang: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has been very aggressive in its action to limit the spread of mountain pine beetle ever since they were discovered in our province outside the national parks in 2002. We implemented an aggressive cut-and-burn program. In the past three to four weeks a massive flight of beetles has resulted in infecting trees in and around Grande Prairie, Fairview, Peace River, and Fox Creek.

Mr. Speaker, this government remains committed to taking the most aggressive action it can to limit the spread of this tiny and deadly bug that has caused so much damage in British Columbia. We will survey all around the area where infected trees are reported. We are in the process of hiring more than 100 seasonal firefighters to do this work. They will be trained to identify the infested trees, and they will then cut and burn them. We will cut and burn every infested tree we find. We are working closely with industry to mitigate the situation as well. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has asked forest companies to make changes to their harvest plans. That way, companies will be able to harvest the stands that are most likely to be infected.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very confident that everything that can be done is being done to limit the spread of mountain pine beetles in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Alberta Labour Market

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is time to end the war. I'm not talking about some conflict in some faraway land. I'm not talking about some war on drugs or crime. I am talking about the war that's been waged against occupation groups in our Alberta for the last generation. Limit doctors, hammer teachers, squeeze academics, control the nurses, destroy the traditional trades organizations; the list goes on.

Look at the trades. Labour brokers have been given union status by the government's not-so-arm's-length Labour Relations Board. These wise-guy brokers brag to big investors about how they can limit wages and benefits and conditions. They do not rally their worker clients and try to improve their state in life. If few want to work through them, they say: no problem. They'll get their friends in government to bring in temporary foreign workers.

Lists of workers are bought and sold like some slave markets of old. Fake unions have been bought and sold. Big lie words are used with impunity. Words like "open shop" and "merit" and "Christian" and "progressive" are used loosely where the syndicate organizations using these titles bear no resemblance to the words' true meanings. They trumpet and advertise their integrity as if it somehow makes what they do right. Think about it. Any group that has to advertise their integrity obviously knows that they have a problem with it. The big lie.

But Albertans, especially young Albertans, are not stupid for long. They look elsewhere for their future. The effect of all of this has been to create a labour market in chaos that is dragging a huge anchor, limiting its ability to adapt. Why else do we have concession bargaining by the trades in a time when they should be making real gains? Why do we have two strains of apprenticeship forming,

limited skilling cheap labour versus full-mobility skills? Why do so many kids leave their trade when they see the hypocrisies? Why do so few graduate from apprenticeship?

No. It's time to end the war. End the special treatment for the labour brokers. Let them operate as what they are and forget the facade. Let people actually choose. Let Albertans have true freedom to be represented and to learn. It will solve our labour market woes quicker than you think. End the war now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Vermilion Centennial

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In honour of Vermilion's 100th birthday some historical vignettes if I may.

In 1897 the first rancher settled in the Vermilion area, and in 1905 the railway arrived, a station was built, the post office was relocated, and by the end of 1905 the town could boast three hotels. In 1906 it was incorporated as a village, and in the same year incorporated as a town. The first grain elevator was built in 1909. The ag society incorporated in 1906, and the *Vermilion Standard* started to publish and still publishes to this day. In 1911 the provincial government established a demonstration farm west of Vermilion. It later became the Vermilion School of Agriculture and is known today as Lakeland College.

2:40

Oil was discovered near Vermilion in the late '30s, and in fact for the first eight months of 1941 it was the second highest producing oil field in Canada and made a valuable contribution to the war effort.

The first gas turbine used to generate electricity was located in Vermilion in 1954.

In 1959 the Alberta Fire Training School was established in Vermilion and obviously continues very successfully today as Fire Etc., a part of Lakeland College.

We have very successful people out of Vermilion. I'm sure you all know of Beckie Scott, our gold medallist and silver medallist. Susan Massitti set Canadian records in speed skating and represented us in the Nagano Olympics. We've hockey players by the dozen: Art Wiebe from the Stanley Cup champion Blackhawks – some may remember that – Jeff Woywitka, Grant McNeill, just to mention a few. Charlie Mead played baseball for the New York Giants back in the '40s. We have Mr. Bert Mead, test pilot, who worked with developing the first automatic takeoff and landing to allow us to land and take off from aircraft carriers. We all know Jean Paré, the country's most successful cookbook author, selling over 24 million cookbooks.

Over the hundred years some businesses have been there the whole time: Long's, Craig's, Webb's of Vermilion.

Solid Roots – Strong Future, Mr. Speaker. That's Vermilion's logo on its pin. I wish to join all Albertans and congratulate Mayor Judy Woyewitka and the wonderful people of Vermilion on a hundred years.

Frank Janett

Ms DeLong: When I first started out fundraising for charity in Bowness, I came to a door with a sign on it: patrolled by Smith and Wesson, with a picture of a handgun beneath it. So, naturally, I just had to knock. A very gruff old man came to the door. "What do you want?" "Donations for cancer." "I don't give out money." So entered Frank Janett, another father figure, into my life.

Over the years Frank would regale us with stories of Bowness characters from the past, stories of the great flood of '48, stories about the bird man but never stories about Frank himself. It was from others, such as Richard McDonnell, that I heard about Frank "Leadfoot" Janett: his racing of Model Ts, stock cars, and sprint cars; how once he was escorted out of the town of Olds by the RCMP for street racing his sprint car at midnight; Frank, who once broke his hand against a guardrail trying to land a punch on a rival in a finish-line skirmish; Frank, who never met a racer he wouldn't lend a hand to and who overcame alcoholism and injury to race high-powered supermodifieds until the age of 50; how he became a mechanic and a crewman, built racers, and then officiated in the fastest class of car races at the fastest racetrack in western Canada.

Frank epitomized to me my Bowness, made up of colourful, heroic characters living unassuming lives.

Frank "Leadfoot" Janett passed away last Father's Day, and, yes, despite his gruff exterior he always gave generously.

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

Development in the Peace Country

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Let's not make the same mistake twice. The municipality of Wood Buffalo has been crying out these past months. Its infrastructure can't handle the pressure of rapid growth. In fact, a member of this very government has spoken out to the same effect and even intervened at a recent Energy and Utilities Board hearing.

The municipalities in the Peace Country do not want the same thing to happen there. They want managed, integrated growth of oil sands to promote both development but also to limit the detrimental impact on the environment and the residents in this more densely populated region.

An integrated, planned approach has many supporters. Municipal leaders, local residents, and even especially industry believe that an overall plan for the region will make for a better and more sustainable future on a level playing field. Local leaders and residents are wondering: how much more drilling will be allowed at Seal Lake and at Carmon Creek? They worry that in the absence of an overall plan drilling projects will continue to be approved piecemeal and without any consideration for the cumulative impact.

The provincial government has a very clear role to play. The departments of Municipal Affairs, Sustainable Resource Development, Energy, Infrastructure and Transportation, and especially Environment need to work together with stakeholders to craft an integrated plan for the staggered development of the oil sands in the Peace Country. It is, after all, the province that gives the go-ahead for the drilling of new wells. The province has a responsibility to think about the impact of these decisions and not download it onto the municipality.

The oil wells in the Peace Country are not like Fort McMurray. Wells are being drilled next to farms, villages, rivers, and lakes. This region has been settled for many centuries. People are worried about the environmental and social impacts on their lands. If we want to avoid the problems of the overheated economy like in Fort McMurray and to preserve the diversified economy in the Peace Country, then an integrated plan is absolutely essential.

Thank you.

The Speaker: To the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster: there's a clarification here required. I want to make sure that *Hansard* gets this right. Did the hon. member say that *Company's Coming* cookbooks by Mme Paré had done 24 million copies or \$24 million in business?

Mr. Snelgrove: Twenty-four million copies, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Twenty-four million? Perhaps only two books in the world have ever had 24 million, one the Bible, the other the Koran. I don't know who could have ever done 24 million.

Mr. Snelgrove: Well, that's what they told me in the paper.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling 1,427 petitions, for a grand total of 1,916 to today, urging the government to move the northwest leg of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road south of the current proposal to reduce noise and increase safety measures as well as minimize the environmental impact of the road.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table, with permission, a petition with 135 signatures from concerned Edmonton-McClung residents. The petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to work with the City of Edmonton to ensure that the traffic noise from the Edmonton Ring Road near our neighbourhood of Wedgewood Ravine is evaluated immediately and again in six months, and that if the noise levels measured are found to exceed acceptable provincial or municipal thresholds, that noise attenuation and reduction measures be implemented as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly. This petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to immediately abandon plans to increase the role of private insurance in the health care system, and instead, commit to strengthening the single-payer, public system.

This petition has been signed by over 100 Albertans.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to the rules of the Assembly I rise to give a notice of motion that I will move a motion under Standing Order 30 resolving that

the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the Assembly urge the government to introduce election financing legislation requiring full disclosure of all campaign contributions and their sources for all leadership contests of registered political parties and that they do so prior to the selection of the new leader of the Progressive Conservative Association [of Alberta].

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, all regarding the question I directed to the Premier earlier in question period. The first is a letter dated August 2, 2006, from the Minister of Energy to myself, and this indicates that "the Crown royalty quantities and estimated royalty exempted under section 15(1)(c) of the Natural Gas Royalty Regulation, 2002, for the 2003-2005 period are shown below." This is the "Crown royalty share of gigajoules (GJs) burned as fuel royalty exempt" and the "estimated royalty exemption value."

Also, I have the current supply demand report from the Power Pool yesterday, indicating that many units had to operate at overcapacity to meet the demand.

The last tabling I have is also from yesterday. It's the actual posted pool price for electricity, and even yesterday during question period it was at its maximum at \$999.99 a megawatt, or 99 cents a kilowatt, per hour.

2:50

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to table in the Assembly the requisite number of five copies of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta annual report for the previous year, 2005-2006.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the Alberta Research Council's 2005-2006 annual report. This annual report demonstrates how ARC operates as a premiere agent of the government of Alberta and the impact it creates on the economy of Alberta and on the lives of Albertans.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from David Cournoyer, the chairman of the Council of Alberta University Students, to the Minister of Advanced Education. In the letter Mr. Cournoyer expresses disappointment that despite the opportunity presented by the sitting of the Assembly, the minister has not put tuition fees back into the legislation. Mr. Cournoyer also feels that the minister could have at least tied tuition increases to increases to the consumer price index.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Boutilier, Minister of Environment, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act and the Government Accountability Act the Ministry of Environment 2004-2005 annual report and pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act the Environmental Protection Security Fund annual report April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Renner, Minister of Municipal Affairs, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2005, the Alberta Elevating Devices & Amusement Rides Safety Association annual report April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006, the Petroleum Tank Management

Association of Alberta annual report 2005 and pursuant to the Safety Codes Act the 2005 annual report of the Safety Codes Council and the authorized accredited agencies activities summary 2004-2005.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Optometrists annual report to government 2005, the College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2005, the College of Alberta Denturists 2005 annual report, the Alberta College of Medical Laboratory Technologists 2005 annual report; pursuant to the Mental Health Act the Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate Office 2005 annual report; pursuant to the Opticians Act the Alberta Opticians Association annual report 2005; pursuant to the Pharmaceutical Profession Act the Alberta College of Pharmacists annual report 2005-2006; pursuant to the Regional Health Authorities Act the Palliser health region annual report 2005-2006, the Chinook health region annual report 2005-06, the East Central health region annual report 2005-2006, the David Thompson health region annual report 2005-2006, the Calgary health region 2005-2006 annual report.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Evans, Minister of Health and Wellness, a response to Written Question 1, asked for by Mr. Martin on behalf of Mr. Mason on March 20, 2006, and the responses to Written Question 8, Written Question 9, and Motion for Return 16, asked for by Ms Blakeman on March 20, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Herard, Minister of Advanced Education, the responses to Written Question 6, Written Question 7, and Motion for Return 14, asked for by Mr. Taylor on March 20, 2006.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Melchin, Minister of Energy, return to order of the Assembly, Motion for Return 6, asked for by Mr. Eggen on March 20, 2006.

head: **Request for Emergency Debate**

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll now deal with a Standing Order 30 application. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Disclosure of Leadership Campaign Contributions

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, that the Assembly urge the government to introduce election financing legislation requiring full disclosure of all campaign contributions and their sources for all leadership contests of registered political parties and that they do so prior to the selection of the new leader of the Progressive Conservative Association [of Alberta].

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I sent a letter, which has been distributed to all House leaders, to your office before the deadline of 11:30, as laid out in Standing Order 30(1). *Beauchesne's* 387 and *Marleau and Montpetit* at 588 say that a debate under this standing order must deal with a specific question that requires urgent consideration, it must be within the administrative competence of the government, and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

Mr. Speaker, we are calling for a debate on a very specific action that the government should take, in our view; namely, that the Assembly discuss the lack of rules for disclosure of financing in leadership campaigns, although Albertans would be well served by a broader discussion of electoral reform as well. The more immediate concern that I want to raise is that there are no disclosure or transparency requirements of leadership contests for registered political parties in this province. Indeed, as all members of this House are aware, such a contest is under way right now.

Mr. Speaker, I note, too, that the changes I'm proposing to discuss are well within the administrative competence of the government. One needs to look no further than section 2 of the Election Finances

and Contributions Disclosure Act, which specifically exempts leadership contests from the requirements laid out in the act. The government has clearly legislated in this area already, so it is within the competence of the House and the government.

This motion, in our view, meets the requirements in *Marleau and Montpetit* on page 588 and *Beauchesne's* 391 to 392 that the matter is not under adjudication by a court of law, does not raise a question of privilege, and has not been previously addressed in this session.

That brings us to the question of whether the matter is better dealt with as part of a substantive motion elsewhere. Looking at the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker, I only see a single piece of government business, which is the Appropriation Act. As I'm sure you can appreciate, this is clearly not a question of appropriations or government spending. We cannot ask the Finance minister or any of the ministers who have brought supplementary estimates to this House to debate election finance reform. There are only, after today, two days of business scheduled, and there are no more days of private members' business, and there is apparently no other legislation to be debated.

With respect to the urgent public importance, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this Legislature has seen fit to legislate both donation limits and public disclosure requirements with respect to most operations of political parties in this province. The single major omission is leadership campaign financing. Leadership is, of course, a keystone of the activities of all political parties within our current system. Other jurisdictions, including the federal government and the province of Manitoba, have recognized this in legislation. Why have we recognized it in legislation with respect to political parties? Why have we adopted the principle that there should be disclosure and campaign limits? It's because we have accepted that the public has a right to know who is paying for the operations of political parties so that that might serve as a check against the activities of a government or of a political party. If they are acting not in the public interest but in the interests of those financing their activities, the public can then discern that and can draw appropriate political conclusions.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I respect your comments earlier in question period about singling out a political party, but this speaks very much to the urgency of the issue. In my view this is an unfortunate situation, but the winner of the current leadership race of the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta will automatically become the Premier of the province at least until the next election. So this is, in my view, not just a matter of public importance but of supreme public importance. This is perhaps the most important political decision that is currently under consideration. It is extremely important to all Albertans and is therefore, I think, something that needs to be brought within the purview of this motion.

3:00

This motion is clearly intended to encourage the government to bring forward legislation that affects all political parties and deals with them equally, but we cannot forget that the leadership race now under way will determine, at least for a short time, the Premier of this province, and therefore it is of extreme importance. As elected officials we all have a stake in bringing integrity and transparency to Alberta's political process. Active engagement by voters based on information is key to democracy.

So to conclude, I would observe that this is probably the last opportunity for this Assembly to debate this matter, making it truly urgent, and I would reiterate that although such reforms have already taken place in other jurisdictions, it is not too late for Alberta to catch up.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'll recognize two additional participants on this very, very briefly. We'll go with the hon. Deputy Government House Leader and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I had an opportunity, in answer to one of the questions in question period, to address part of this particular matter. I don't intend to repeat what I said at that time, although I would like to incorporate it into my argument against the motion.

I find that it's somewhat ironic that at this time the leader of the ND opposition brings forward this motion. I've been in this House since 1997, and by my count there have been three leaders of the NDs in that time period. There have been four leaders of the Liberal opposition. There have been since 1992, when our Premier became Premier, four elections. After each election presumably there was a report similar to the one that was prepared this year by the Chief Electoral Officer regarding the elections and recommendations for discussion points put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer. There have been opportunities by the opposition to bring forward private members' bills and so on and so forth. So I don't think that the particular rule that's being put forward can possibly be that because there is no opportunity under the Order Paper to have a discussion with respect to this matter, it must be urgent. Therefore, one takes a look at the facts behind this.

This matter clearly has been the subject of discussion within the ND Party and within the Liberal Party on a number of occasions over the last 10 years that we've been here. They have never felt the need to bring forward this matter to govern their parties' affairs, and the legislation at this point in time clearly provides that it is a party matter. They found it completely satisfactory for their purposes until now, and because we happen to be having a leadership within the party that this government is part of, they would like to have a debate on it. I don't think it's urgent in any sense, Mr. Speaker. I think the facts surrounding it indicate that that is the case.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly on this application for Standing Order 30 sponsored by the NDP opposition. I'm not going to repeat some of the citations and quotations from *Beauchesne* and all the other references, but I can probably understand where the NDP opposition is coming from. Further to the comment by the hon. Government House Leader about private members' bills, private members' bills are submitted way in advance to the extent that currently, in August of 2006, we have a September 18 deadline to submit our private members' bills to Parliamentary Counsel for next spring. So there was no way we could have anticipated the events that have transpired and the leadership race that is currently under way.

Second, further to assessing all the tests that one has before we allow a Standing Order 30, we mentioned no bills, no motions on the Order Paper. We mentioned also that no written questions and no motions for returns are on the Order Paper, and arguably, like was demonstrated today in question period, Oral Question Period is not the best avenue to seek information from this government, given their customary and usual way of dismissing the opposition and dodging questions and deflecting criticism.

In terms of the urgency, Mr. Speaker. Again, we know that this is an internal party matter within the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta, but the outcome has a profound effect on everybody living in this province. Whoever wins the PC leadership race does in fact basically become the Premier for a certain period of time. The motivation behind Standing Order 30 is to ensure the

greatest degree of transparency in that race and, if anything, to try to alleviate some of the concerns people have with politicians in general but possibly with Tories in particular, especially after 35 years of uninterrupted power.

I may also be inclined to support this motion because of our own Alberta Liberal position with respect to democratic renewal in this province. Many citizens do not trust politicians anymore, and they feel distanced from and disenfranchised by the state of affairs in this province. The Alberta Liberals would certainly hope that faith is restored in the democratic process in the abstract sense but then also in practical terms would reflect in things such as higher voter turnouts, youth participation, more female representation, and more collaborative politics. This is something we've campaigned on.

We've introduced ideas in this House to strengthen democracy as such, things like a lobbyist registry, whistle-blower protection, fixed election dates, and campaign finance reform, which is to some extent the issue being dealt with here. Some of these ideas, Mr. Speaker, have been embraced by a number of those PC leadership hopefuls, and I'm glad to say that they're increasingly sounding like us Liberals. This is something that makes us happy because our ideas are proven sound.

Under *Beauchesne* 390 the distinction is made between urgency and the urgency of debate. The Government House Leader – no surprise – indicated that he doesn't think it's urgent. As such, I would urge you, Mr. Speaker, to put this matter to a vote by all hon. colleagues from both sides of the House under Standing Order 30(3) to gauge the appetite of the hon. members in this Assembly, to see where they stand on the issue, and to proceed from there.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 30(2) the Member may briefly state the arguments in favour of the request for leave . . . which was done,

. . . and the Speaker may allow such debate as he . . . considers relevant to the question of urgency of debate and shall then rule on whether or not the request for leave is in order.

The chair is prepared to rule on the fourth Standing Order 30 application since this sitting started last Thursday. The previous decisions can be reviewed at pages 1694 and 1695 and 1728, 1729, and 1730 of *Alberta Hansard*, so the chair will not repeat all of the authorities.

The chair confirms that the ND leader, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, provided proper notice to the Speaker's office. The request was received at 11:10 this morning, so the requirements under Standing Order 30(1) have been met. The subject matter of the request was also provided to the Speaker's office.

As members heard last Thursday and yesterday, before the question as to whether this motion should proceed can be put to the Assembly, the chair must determine whether the motion meets the requirements of Standing Order 30(7), which requires that the matter proposed for discussion "relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration."

Similar to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's request yesterday, this request seems to be inconsistent with the requirements of Standing Order 30(6), which indicates that "an emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." This request reads like a private member's motion as it urges the government to bring forward legislation. While there may not be a matter to discuss or debate this issue in the current sitting, the subject of financing fiduciary campaigns does not in the chair's view constitute an emergency in any way, shape, or form.

We'll repeat the historic analysis of the last 13 years with respect to this. There have been at least three Official Opposition leadership

campaigns. This matter has never been raised by anyone in those three. There have been at least three third-party leadership campaigns, and to the chair's knowledge this matter has never been a pressing matter before. Why in the case of one leadership campaign in 13 years this becomes an emergency today is very difficult for the chair to understand in trying to determine this an emergency in any way, shape, or form. It may be an issue of concern and debate, but whether or not it is an emergency is quite the other thing, and the chair wants to reiterate Standing Order 30(6). So the chair will not put the question. The emergency debate will not proceed.

3:10

There's one additional thing the chair would like to say. While the chair respects the rights of every member to utilize the rules and to bring forward matters for debate, the chair is concerned that matters clearly not emergencies are being brought forward under the guise of emergency debates. The chair treats these applications under Standing Order 30 very seriously and would only ask that members respect the rule and, in turn, the institution. If individual members have difficulty understanding Standing Order 30 and would like private consultation with the chair, the chair's office is always open for this pedagogical exercise as we advance and improve our understanding of the Standing Orders.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading
Bill 44
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2)

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Minister of Finance in order to move second reading of Bill 44, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2).

I would only note that these supplementary supply estimates have already been debated in the Legislative Assembly in Committee of Supply over the past couple of days and that they are required in order to help cover extraordinary pressures facing many different parts of government operations. We are grateful to have these dollars available for those important needs. With that, I will cede the floor to others who may wish to present their comments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has moved the bill on behalf of the Minister of Finance.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have before us the appropriation bill for this very brief summer sitting of this Assembly. It is my understanding that this is the second shortest sitting in Alberta's history, at least lately. I'm sure someone in Public Affairs is going to scramble to research this to try to prove me wrong. It is ridiculously short regardless of whether this House sat fewer days before or not. This bill, Bill 44, called the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2006 (No. 2) is the second in one year. It should be called the extra-spending bill or the in-hindsight bill.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Alberta's budgets under the current Tory administration are never final or credible documents. They're a work in progress, constantly

in flux. You pass a budget, and then you pass three more quarterly minibudgets until the next throne speech, and so on. When you add interim supply, Mr. Speaker, it gets more complicated. As a layman I had never heard of supplementary supply till I joined this esteemed House. I can understand it when we're talking about a genuine emergency or something that is being used very infrequently and very far between under special circumstances, but instead it has become the preferred method, the way we do business in this province. It's the normal way the government prefers.

Yesterday in speaking with some of my caucus colleagues who've been here longer than I, it was made clear to me that back then all they did was approve additional funding for an emergency, like I mentioned, something like extra money for the firefighters. Possibly they added one other department for something very minor, maybe two at the most, not the practice we have here today, where 15 ministries or departments each get a piece of the pie, and the pie itself has grown so excessively large.

Mr. Speaker, we today are basically asked or, to be more accurate, we are being forced to rubber-stamp 15 minibudgets for 15 government departments worth \$1.37 billion in three hours and 45 minutes in Committee of Supply. That's more than \$6 million per minute. Last night, for example, we only had enough time for four departments out of the 10 scheduled for debate. Again, that is totally unacceptable.

As I mentioned, supplementary supply is okay when it's a natural disaster or an unforeseen circumstance. Otherwise, everything should be in the main budget. But this government cannot or will not budget. The talk about fiscal conservatism and how this government manages the affairs of this province has long been strayed from. The hon. Minister of Finance and some of her colleagues sometimes express their frustration at how much it pains them to spend, but the money they waste on things like the Aon report back in the spring or the \$1 million that was slated for the third-way propaganda campaign that never saw the light of day doesn't bother them one bit. That doesn't bother them. Waste doesn't bother them.

The fact that they do not budget is something that I find very troublesome. The short legislative sessions and the mockery that we call a budget are this government's plan to minimize the amount of scrutiny and close examination that they may be subjected to. That's as much planning as this government is willing to do. In terms of fiscal planning, the actual governance and management of this province's affairs, there is clearly no plan. The various arms of this government – and there are many to this beast – do not talk to each other, and it's time that we evaluate this situation and try to rectify it. It's time to disengage the autopilot and take charge of this vessel, which is totally adrift. Status quo just does not cut it anymore.

One can also translate the need for supplementary supply into the equivalent of a deficit, needing more money to pay for something for which funds were allocated previously. This government is cool asking for more and more money, and it doesn't bother them. But in my constituency office I have to be very careful with my budget, and if I'm one penny over, it comes out of next year's budget. That's how careful I have to be. No free rides. School boards, health authorities, and many other government agencies and departments are also treated with this philosophy or this approach. They do not enjoy the luxury that this government enjoys. On the contrary, they are usually the victims of poor management and poor planning and are frequently audited, penalized, or even, in fact, fired. Why doesn't this government apply the same standards to its own operations?

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, today I wanted to focus briefly on Innovation and Science since I am the Official Opposition critic for that department. It's a department that is asking for money this time

around, and it didn't have time to be looked at yesterday because of the rushed evening sitting. So we have a department that is asking for \$20 million, which is not really a terrible sum of money. I have to agree that this ministry is a good-news ministry, and I support them getting this money. I mentioned this back in the spring under the regular budget.

We can only criticize this ministry, if we're going to, based on their granting process; for example, if their granting process is skewed or if the guidelines are not being adhered to. In essence, what I'm saying here is that this government is wise to invest more money in Innovation and Science, and my reasons are to follow. Fifteen million dollars is for energy-related research, and \$5 million is for the Water for Life strategy research. Right away I would indicate that while I support the initial \$15 million for energy research, the question always is: why mostly energy? Why can't we move on or expand to other sectors which can be equally or more lucrative? However great our resource reserves, they're still finite and are bound to run out. We have a responsibility to the future generations of this province to leave them with something. The money we make today belongs to us, yes, but equally to our children and grandchildren. So as important as energy research might be, other fields of research are also worthy of attention and support.

Why isn't any money being put toward encouraging the development of the tech sector, for example? Why can't we turn Alberta into the Japan of North America or the Korea of North America, for example? Why not invest in pharmaceutical research, nutraceutical research, agriculture, or veterinary medicine? The list goes on, of course. Are we doing enough? Is the government telling us that everything else should wait or could wait?

Also, if we're talking energy, what timelines does the Ministry of Innovation and Science have in place for the development of renewable energy resources? I'm interested in this twofold. One, because I said that our reliance on fossil fuel should not and cannot continue indefinitely, and other sources of energy have to be identified and commercialized. Two, I'm also approaching this as an investment, as something we can make money on or from, something we can generate some decent revenue from, something we can benefit from right here in Alberta and can sell to the world and be leaders.

3:20

Water, which is the second part of this money being requested, is also of paramount importance, and water research is money well spent. We need to know how much water we still have or how much is left, and how much is being used by oil and gas. We need to forecast and plan our water future as the population grows and the resource dwindles and so on. Water for Life is indeed an operative phrase as water is life, and we have to address both the internal and external pressures on this valuable asset.

Furthermore, I would like to see this commitment for further funding in 2007-08, which has been alluded to as being \$25 million and even beyond. I would like to see it materialize into a long-term plan, not ad hoc, not one-time announcements. I would like it to be a constant plan that is again being adhered to. Can I tell people that this minister or his colleague in Environment have a long-term vision or plan for our water? Can I tell people that should this vision or plan be ready, the Tory caucus will endorse it and fully fund it?

Moving on, Mr. Speaker. Now that we have a new minister looking after this department, why not conduct a thorough review or inventory of all research initiatives in this province to see what's missing or lacking and to look for areas of potential growth? What percentage is our research drive compared to the entire provincial budget or whatever other measure we choose, like the GDP? How do we compare against other North American jurisdictions?

I have some reservations as to the budgets passed in this province, you know, the size of them and the uncontrolled growth that they have experienced. Instead, I want to focus on other departments if I may. I want to briefly mention some of the areas I would advocate as a member of the Liberal caucus, which is something that we advocated during the campaign and after, so inside the House and outside: something like establishing a provincial policy to direct the research and commercialization of cleaner energy and renewable energy initiatives in this province; implementing a 10 per cent provincial tax credit for eligible expenditures in scientific research and experimental development; implementing a 30 per cent provincial tax credit for investment in qualified early-stage Alberta-based technology companies; creating something like a \$150 million Alberta technology venture fund, which is a request we've asked in this House time and time again, funded jointly by industry, university, and government to generate a venture capital industry in this province; and, lastly, creating a provincial technology program to harmonize technology commercialization programs across the province so that instead of a sporadic or separated, piecemeal approach we would have a harmonized, concise approach.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I am supportive of Innovation and Science getting this money. I just think it should have been budgeted in the first place.

Lastly, I have a very brief question with respect to the granting process because, really, Innovation and Science is a granting ministry. They just give money out. I am concerned that giving money in-year, basically outside of the budget in supplementary supply, might actually lead to some waste or to an inefficient expenditure of these funds. So I am concerned that the minister should really assure us that they have adequate safeguards in place to guard against any of that wrongdoing.

Now, moving on if I may, the second area of interest for me is education, of course. A large chunk of this supplementary supply bill is for K to 12 education. I'm also proud and grateful to have been chosen by the Alberta Teachers' Association as a friend of public education for 2006. As such, I feel an obligation to enter into this discussion here today and to focus some of my energy and my time on education.

Let's have a look at the July 13, 2006, press release from the Ministry of Education. They're committing an additional \$180 million to be infused into the veins and arteries of this department, bringing the total government support for education in '06-07 to almost \$5.5 billion. Amazing. That's a great story. Of this \$180 million \$61 million is for operational support in classrooms, and \$119 million goes toward school upgrades and renovations. The press release references and links to the renewed funding framework, which has been brought up in this House time and time again, but the link is broken, or the report is mysteriously missing for some reason. I'm not sure if maybe some of the people in the department are working on it, and that's why they removed it.

I know that some work is being done to implement the class-size initiative in 2006-07, but let's hope that significant improvements are achieved. Mr. Speaker, I'll be one of the first people to commend the hon. minister when those targets are reached. Class sizes went down for a brief period after the Learning Commission report, but they have crept back up since. This deserves attention and requires decisive action, which requires leadership.

The Alberta government expenditure per student in 2000-01 was about \$6,800, when back then the budget for K to 12 education was something like \$3.65 billion. So when you take \$5.5 billion in 2006 after this new infusion of money, after this supplementary supply lifeline, and you subtract the \$3.65 billion back in the year 2000, the government spin doctors will come out saying that in six years

spending has increased by about \$1.85 billion. The student population, however, has grown, and so did government spending, realizing, of course, that education is an investment in our future and not merely an entry on the expense side of our budget. It's an investment.

The government conveniently fails to go back, of course, to the trimming days of '92-93 and elects to only highlight the better half of the picture. The hon. minister will boast in this House about how much money is being spent every day on education as per his answers on August 24, 2006, when he indicated "\$27.9 million each and every school day." He does not, however, tell us how much it represents today per student. How much money are we investing per student?

The same press release I mentioned just a minute ago tells us that the base instruction grant rate in the 2006-07 school year would rise after this infusion to \$5,291 per student. I would certainly conclude, Mr. Speaker, that this represents a drop from \$6,800 back in the year 2000, dollar for dollar in the simplest form, and we're not even looking at inflation or the rising cost of living in this boom time. So this is the bigger snapshot.

To take a smaller snapshot, Budget 2006 sees the government blow its own horn, talking about a 3.2 per cent average increase in funding for school boards, a 3.2 per cent average across the province. However, this is less than the inflation rate. Take the consumer price index for the month of July 2006: 140.8. If you want to understand it, Mr. Speaker, that's compared to a base score of 100 for the year 1992. So now we're 40 per cent higher than what we were at in '92, the highest in the country. The percentage change for the period July 2005 to July 2006 in Alberta was positive, or plus 4.3 per cent, again the highest increase in inflation in the country.

This supplemental infusion is a welcome gesture. I'm not arguing against it. I think it's a little late, but it's positive nevertheless. I know that the hon. minister, especially with his teaching background, recognizes the pressures that are faced by the system, but I also know that it is not easy for him when he does his sales pitch to his caucus colleagues, and for that I totally and truly sympathize. The government spin doctors will understandably showcase this extra spending but will ignore the fact that this money did not make it into the budget we just approved a few months ago. Is this government yielding or reacting to pressure? If yes, good. It's a sign of life, however faint. Government being responsive, that is, even if only motivated by political survival.

We as opposition members are often accused in this House of being big spenders or asking for more money for programs and services. I would seize this opportunity today, Mr. Speaker, to clarify that we as Alberta Liberals demand and offer better management whether or not more money is invested in certain key and critical areas. Management is the word to be underlined here, responsible management with a clear plan and a concise vision, not an ad hoc one of supplements crammed through in an extremely short, rubber-stamping Legislative sitting.

You know, here's another example. Again the same press release, telling us that the infrastructure and maintenance renewal funding will increase by \$119 million on top of this initial \$81 million to ensure that students' learning environments remain safe and healthy. This is definitely a victory for this minister to secure this kind of extra funding and is a good first step. But think about this, Mr. Speaker: the supplement is greater than the initial amount budgeted. The supplement, the lifeline, is greater than what they budgeted back in April and May. If so, why were our requests ignored last spring? Why was this government as dismissive of and resistant to our ideas in opposition when we were debating the budget back in the spring? You cannot help but wonder when the supplement is 47 per cent

higher than the principal amount, and we're still a ways to go on the huge infrastructure deficit and school maintenance backlog. If they lack a plan, they should perhaps consider listening to some of the other ideas presented in this House in good faith.

Moving on again, Mr. Speaker, I have many points about education. This particular one was raised by some speakers in this esteemed Assembly before, English as a Second Language, which is an area that needs more attention, and more needs to be done. It was not included in this added support under supplementary supply.

3:30

Similarly, the area which I personally care about, the issue of school fees and the issue of the need for parents and guardians to fund raise more and more, not only for the extras but, increasingly, for the basics as well, which I find alarming and objectionable: no sign of relief on this issue.

Furthermore, transportation costs. Remember back in June of this year when the hon. minister came out with a token \$8 million announcement to try to help alleviate some of the concerns with respect to transportation costs. Everyone told him back then that that was not enough. Again, I'm urging him to reconsider today, to continually monitor the situation, especially with fuel prices as high as they are. They're not expected to go down any time soon.

Special needs is another huge area. My staff and I at the constituency office in Edmonton-McClung have assisted a few constituents already with placement requests. What seems to be the predominant issue, of course, is funding. The magnitude is one aspect, the magnitude of funding, the size. But, also, the portability of this funding is equally important, how we can move the students from one place to the next and how we can make the money that is allocated towards looking after them move with them. More attention should be focused on this issue as more special-needs students join our schools and as the education environment evolves to try to make it fair to them and also to their classmates as well, plus their teachers and their teacher aides.

One more issue with respect to education, Mr. Speaker, which I talked about previously, was school boundaries and the catchment areas and how some students who live less than a block or two blocks away from a school are forced to go to another school in an attempt to even out the enrolment figures across the province. So instead of a kid walking for less than five minutes to his or her preferred school, he or she now takes a bus for 35 or more minutes to try to go to a different school because of that enrolment and catchment issue with the school boundaries. Again, it doesn't make sense, especially when some parents lie about or misrepresent their address in an effort to try to get their kid in their preferred school.

I will continue later, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a start. If I remember word for word what Calgary public school trustee Pat Cochrane had to say after the Education minister announced the \$180 million in additional funding that we are talking about in supplementary supply estimates debate, among other things, that was her comment to reporters: well, it's a start. But that's about all that it is: a start.

Yes, you know, it's a good idea to see an increase in the base per-pupil instructional grant. It's a good idea to see extra money in the budget for students with severe disabilities. It's a good idea – it's a superb idea in the case of school boards like the big metro school boards – to increase and extend the funding eligibility cap beyond five years for English as a Second Language students. Not every

student from another country can master this language of ours in five years. Yes, it's good that money has been put into the class size initiative so that school boards can hire more teachers.

I'm not going to take time today to discuss whether the estimates under each one of those categories are what they should be, whether there should be more in there, whether there should be less in there or not. I'm going to focus primarily on what is, I think, the single biggest issue for schools and teachers and students and parents in my constituency because school starts again on Tuesday next. While there may be many parts of rural Alberta where people may be praying for rain – I don't know; it's been a dry summer in much of the province – in Calgary-Currie they'll be praying that it doesn't rain so that the roofs don't leak on the students on the first day of school.

You know, I've got two kids – one grown to adulthood, one very nearly so – so I have experience as a parent of kids in the public school system, and I have experience as once upon a time having been a child myself in the public school system at a time when my father, as a matter of fact, was a school trustee in Ontario. So I've been associated with public education long enough to see a fair number of fads come and go. There was the back-to-basics movement. There was year-round education. I even remember that when I first started out in talk radio, it seemed like every fifth commercial that we played on that radio station was for the Hooked on Phonics game. I wonder if anybody still has that game.

But, you know, through all of that, from the time I started kindergarten more years ago than I care to admit until very recently, there has been one thing that never has been a fad, there's been one thing that's been a consistent, and that has been this: the physical surroundings in which our children are educated. As parents we've trusted that when our children went off to school, they would be spending the day safe, warm, and dry in a well-maintained learning environment. Well, I guess that's a pretty naive assumption these days.

I take a little bit of pride – and my colleague from Calgary-Varsity should too because he joined me on this darn-fooled idealistic crusade of mine, which was at the behest of the school administration at Western Canada high school, one of the finest, most storied secondary schools in not only this province, not only in my city, in my constituency, but right across the west of Canada. My colleague and I late last June toured Western Canada high school along with the public school trustee Miss Cochrane, a couple of parent council members, and two student council representatives at the behest of school administrators who wanted me to see for myself the general state of disrepair of Western Canada high school. They wanted me to understand what they've been up against in trying to deal with this government for the last – I guess it's been eight years now since the facilities audit was done. They wanted me to see for myself just what the rains of June had done to their school.

Through that tour and the media coverage and the public attention that it got in Calgary and Calgary-Currie, the Education minister, after having put off and rescheduled four previous appointments, magically appeared just a few days later to himself tour the facility and a couple of other public schools and a couple of other Catholic schools. And a couple of weeks after that – I believe it was during Stampede week, if I remember correctly, because I seem to recall that I was decked out in a cowboy hat and cowboy boots – he actually emerged from a cabinet meeting in Calgary at the McDougall Centre and announced the \$180 million, \$119 million of which was for the infrastructure and maintenance renewal program, and that's when Miss Cochrane said: well, it's a start.

But that's all it is. It's a start. It's 10 per cent of the accumulated infrastructure maintenance deficit of the public school system in the

province of Alberta, the public and Catholic school systems. Calgary board of education by itself has a \$425 million deferred infrastructure deficit, the biggest of any school district in this province. Calgary Catholic has its own deferred infrastructure deficit. So does Edmonton Catholic. So does Edmonton public. So do many smaller school districts. Visit your child's school and you'll see for yourself just how rundown it has become after 12 years of provincial government neglect.

You know, we don't even need to go back that far. I'm just going to run through a little bit of information here about the schools in my constituency, those ones which remain open, of course, because a number of schools in my constituency have been closed because of the way in which this government has applied its utilization formula. In the case of Western Canada high school, for instance, which is actually sort of a collection of individual buildings that grew together and where in order to get from the second floor of one wing of the building to the second floor of another wing of the building, you've got to go down half a staircase, then up a staircase – and there's a fair-sized landing in between those staircases, and under the utilization formula that counts as classroom space, which is just bizarre beyond belief. But I digress.

The general state of affairs is that when the school facility evaluation project was undertaken in 1999, in which audits of Alberta's schools were conducted by the government to determine overall maintenance needs, the schools were given scores. Anything between zero and 399 points ranked as good and from 400 to 799 ranked as fair, and anything 800 or over ranked as poor. At that time Western Canada high school came in as one of the schools in the worst physical condition – that's to be understood; I mean, it goes back to 1928 in the oldest parts, right? – with a score of 960, which is pretty bleeping bad no matter how you cut it.

3:40

An Hon. Member: Pretty bleeping?

Mr. Taylor: Pretty bleeping bad, because they won't let me say the word that I really have on my mind.

Well, you know, here we are seven years later. Over a million tax dollars have been spent on band-aid repairs to Western Canada high school while the province has dithered over a decision to modernize or rebuild the school. In that time the likely cost of the Western Canada high school project has ballooned from \$9 million to \$32 million or more.

As my tour with my colleague from Calgary-Varsity and the school trustee and the school administrators and the parent council members and the student council representatives back at the end of June showed, the tour where they showed me where the water gushed through the roof of the fitness centre and came down one wall like a waterfall during the rain, where it ran in around the windows of the electronics lab and where they had plastic garbage bags all hastily taped up to divert the water away from the computers and the electronics equipment, where the water damage leaked through and caused damage in a science lab and all the other places that the rain poured in, dribbled in, dripped in, ran in – they showed me the classrooms where a couple of windows had blown in during one storm and old wooden window frames that literally were so rotten you could fit your thumb between the edge of the pane of glass and what remained of the edge of the frame.

What all this proves is that with every passing day – you know, every problem proves that the costliest option is to do nothing, which, of course, is the modus operandi of this government. Do nothing. Consult, monitor, and watch the cost balloon. So, typically, the province has given Calgary public \$14 million to maintain

and repair every school in its system. Calgary public, Calgary board of education, is the second largest school district in the entire nation. It's got a lot of schools. It's got a hundred thousand students. You can't do much with \$14 million when it would take \$32 million to modernize or rebuild or fix appropriately, renovate extensively one high school.

And that's not the only story. Let's look, for instance, at Richmond elementary in my constituency, which received a score of 590 in 1999 in the provincial school facilities audit, 590 being just about in the middle of the fair category. That was in 1999. Using the Calgary board of education's own rating system, rating the mechanical, electrical, and structural conditions on a scale from 10, which is very, very good, to 140, which is pretty bleeping awful, Richmond elementary today has a total condition index of 120. That's the evidence of degradation there.

There's evidence of degradation in all kinds of schools in our constituency. You know, I've been to, I think, just about every single one of them: Alternative high school, which is a really cool place for kids who learn differently, kids who joyously proclaim every day that they are square pegs that are not going to be hammered into a round hole, and they go to school in an old elementary school that is very rundown. In 1999 it had a score of 630. It's gotten worse. Its total condition index now is 90 out of 140.

I've been to St. Mary's senior high school in the Catholic system. The Catholic schools in my constituency as a rule have seen some improvement over the course of time, the seven years since the school facilities audit was done. The public schools in my constituency, I'm afraid, have run down even further.

Now, this government, I guess, has tried a number of times in the past to blame all the problems with public education in the city of Calgary on the public school board in the city of Calgary. It's a convenient scapegoat, an effective whipping boy. It has all the responsibility and none of the authority. You know, when you set your governance model up like that, you make the decisions and create an institution, an organization, a board at a level below yours, at a level closer to the irate stakeholders, the irate stakeholders are going to call their school trustee and blast away at them for problems which were of this government's making because of lack of funding.

There are a lot of fine schools in my constituency – elementary, junior high, high school, alternative, even charter schools – each doing in their own unique way the best job they can and often a job that not only meets but exceeds everybody's expectations of educating the children of my constituency and in many cases children bused in from many other constituencies. They're doing the best they can in really inferior conditions.

It seems that my colleague from Calgary-Varsity and I, by touring Western Canada high school late in June, shamed the Education minister and the government of Alberta into actually doing something. But what they did and what they've done in this budget is 10 per cent of what they should have done, and it's not followed by any sustainable, predictable funding plan, so we haven't really made any progress here, Mr. Speaker. What we've done, really, is classic Conservative: throw money at it and hope the critics sit down and shut up. Well, you know, you can't fix many roofs when you got a billion dollars' worth of roofs that leak and \$100 million to fix them. While this may be a start, it's not nearly good enough.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is now available and available after each subsequent speaker, which is a five-minute period for brief questions and comments. Are there any wishing to rise under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

An Hon. Member: What was it he really said?

Mr. Elsalhy: Exactly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie was interrupted midway when he was called on the 15-minute time maximum, so I would like to ask him kindly to finish what he was stating.

Speaker's Ruling Question and Comment Period

The Deputy Speaker: I'm going to read Standing Order 29(2)(a) to everyone here so that you're familiar with it. It says:

Subject to clause (b), which allows for the 20 minutes for the first speaker and the following speaker,

following each speech on the items in debate referred to in suborder (1), a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments.

Upon reading that, I'm not too sure that it's available for the reason the Member for Edmonton-McClung requested, but I will recognize that it has been allowed in the past to do so. So until that gets changed, I'd just like to refer you to the actual standing order. I think it was intended for brief questions and comments, not to continue speeches. But since it was done before, I will allow it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your ruling on that, and I appreciate your advice on that as well. I hope that it's taken and adhered to by all members of this House. We could use a little focus here from time to time, don't you think?

3:50

Debate Continued

Mr. Taylor: The point is simply this. I could run through a list of every school in my constituency, and I could probably get it done in five minutes. You know, you have some schools, like Earl Grey elementary and Mount Royal junior high, that are in fair to good condition. You have some schools, like Western Canada high school, that are in pretty pathetic condition. You have some schools, like St. Mary's Catholic high school, that are in improved condition relative to where they were in 1999 when the school facilities audit was undertaken. But we have maintenance needs that have gone up significantly in a number of schools in the constituency in the past five years.

I guess, really, my point is this. It may be illustrated more vividly in Calgary-Currie, because Calgary-Currie is an inner-city residential constituency, than it is in some other constituencies where the school buildings on average may not be quite as old. But when you drive around the city of Calgary, the city of Edmonton, the province of Alberta, you see schools as a symbol for this province's great paradox: unparalleled private-sector wealth alongside the public school infrastructure of a have-not country.

Mr. Speaker, when this House was in session last spring and we broke for March break, my wife and I went down to Costa Rica for a week. Now, I'll grant you that I saw some schools down there that were in worse condition than schools in my constituency, but I also saw some that were in better physical shape in Costa Rica than in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Relative to the rest of Central and Latin America Costa Rica is a relatively prosperous country, but it ain't got nothing on good old Alberta.

This is the paradox of the province of Alberta expressed in schools, expressed in colleges and universities, expressed in

hospitals and public health clinics, expressed in our road and rapid transit systems, expressed in our infrastructure generally: unparalleled private-sector wealth expressed in total in Fort McMurray in the region of Wood Buffalo, unparalleled private-sector wealth along with the public infrastructure of a have-not country because this government can't seem to see beyond next Tuesday. That, my friends, my colleagues, is pathetic. It's unacceptable, it's inexcusable, it's lazy, it's blinkered, and it's considerably less than the citizens of this province have a right to expect. It's about time – not that I expect them to rise to the occasion – that the government of Alberta started doing its job. I've yet to see any evidence that that's happening.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to the second reading of the appropriation bill, Bill 44. I think the same question that's crossed my mind has crossed many of our minds here over the last few days, and that is: why are we here? Why are we sitting in this extraordinary session in the summer? It's like we've been sent back to summer school because the government can't add. We know that the government and the Premier have had trouble with math in the past.

I just want to say that I think it's a real disappointment that we are in fact having to have this session at all. The fact that this session is taking place at all is really a testament to the incompetence of this Progressive Conservative government. If this government could do the rudimentary things that a government should do, if it could perform the basic functions of a government such as budgeting and planning, we would not be here today. I think the primary reason that we're here is because the government apparently forgot to fund the schools when they passed their budget in the spring session.

Mr. Elsalhy: Forgot or ignored?

Mr. Mason: They forgot; they ignored. I don't know whether it's absent-mindedness, whether it's wilful deafness, or, you know, a simple lack of attention to its functions.

I'm looking at some quotes from *Hansard*. In fact, I asked our staff to put together all of the questions to the Minister of Education from the spring session and to include those questions to the Provincial Treasurer that had to do with the school budgets. At that time, of course, we in the Alberta NDP opposition were telling the government that they had not funded schools adequately. And it wasn't just our opinion, Mr. Speaker. On the 2nd of May the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview addressed the Provincial Treasurer. He said:

School boards across the province are facing a financial squeeze. Edmonton public is the latest school board to be looking at a deficit. In their proposed planning base document presented to the April 18 board meeting, they have projected a \$7 million deficit in this year's budget.

He asked the Minister of Finance:

At a time of multibillion dollar surpluses why are school boards facing a financial squeeze so severe that they are forced to run deficits?

Well, the hon. provincial Minister of Finance talked about "school boards that are elected to carry out the business of providing an education . . . for our students" and that they have been given "a 5 per cent increase in this year's budget." She says that she thinks

"the Minister of Education expects that that should suffice to operate those schools."

Then on the 8th of May the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview again addressed this issue to the Minister of Education. He said, "Edmonton public is one of a growing number of school boards across the province facing crippling budget deficits." Well, the minister again responded with a lot of verbiage and stuff about the Learning Commission, and he accused the NDP opposition of wanting to rush in and so on, but he said that it was "premature . . . to be speculating on whether or not schools will be in deficit positions."

It goes on. On the 18th of May I asked a question of the hon. Premier. I talked about the Alberta Teachers' Association, which said that day that

it has become clear that Budget 2006 does not provide adequate funding . . . resulting in larger class sizes or running deficits – all of which are completely unacceptable in a province having successive multibillion dollar surpluses.

The Premier said:

Well, you know, Mr. Speaker . . . I have a difficult time understanding where these particular complaints come from . . . There are no cuts. There haven't been cuts since 1993-94. It's been more and more and more [money] . . . every year. So \$330 million is a lot of money. That's just for operating, and that's in addition to all the dollars we've poured in for capital construction.

Mr. Speaker, the government cannot say that the opposition or school boards or teachers or parents did not bring to their attention the deficiency of the budget which they presented to this Legislature in the spring session because it's here and it's clear. It's a matter of public record. So why didn't they do it? Why didn't they fund it adequately?

4:00

You know, I heard the Minister of Education say: well, we haven't got the final numbers yet. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? They don't get the final numbers when they pass the spring budget in any year. For 30 years before that this government alone was able to provide a budget to this Legislature that minimally met the needs of school boards and children in this province without the final numbers, but somehow this government now is no longer able to do so. This minister is unable to do so, and this provincial Finance minister is unable to bring forward a budget that actually funds schools adequately.

So, Mr. Speaker, instead of listening to the ATA and to parents and to school boards across the province and instead of listening to the NDP opposition, the government passed the budget, and here we are in an emergency session – because that's what this is – to pass a sufficient budget so that there won't be layoffs in schools, so that we won't be turning children away from classrooms. Yet even so there's a real question as to whether or not it's enough. That is not competent governance. That is clearly a government that is unable to perform minimal functions that the people that elected it expect from it. It's a government, in my view, that is in crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal a little bit with health care services as well. Health authorities across the province have also been communicating to the government about the stresses and strains that they're experiencing. In Grande Prairie, for example, patients were repeatedly flown to Edmonton for emergency surgery. Emergency rooms, intensive care beds, even operating rooms in at least five health regions had to shut down because of acute staff shortages.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about growth and the pressures of growth. This government has been talking about growth for years. The whole function of the Alberta advantage, which was introduced in the mid-90s, over 10 years ago, was

designed to facilitate economic growth. That was the government's claim. Yet when the growth occurs – and, I might add, not because of the Alberta advantage and the various cuts and changes that the government made at that time but because of sky-high world oil prices – it's amazing to see that this government is actually surprised by it and unprepared for it.

You know, if you look back to the other major goal of the government – and that was the elimination of the debt – you found the same thing. They worked so hard to pay down the debt. They poured billions of dollars into it, sacrificing people's jobs, sacrificing quality of care in hospitals, in seniors' lodges, and in our schools, but they paid down that debt with single-minded determination. When it was finally paid off, Mr. Speaker, they had no plan for the massive surpluses that replaced it. So even though they worked very hard and diligently, I might say, to pay down the debt, once they'd accomplished that goal, they seemed surprised to have gotten there. So we see a parallel situation. We see the paydown of the debt with no plan for the postdebt world, and we see the effort to build economic growth in the province with no plan to deal with the growth.

Now, some little changes in committees that the Premier has made, appointing the Minister of Justice as chairman of the committee and so on, is a bit like closing the barn door after the horse is out. So the hon. Minister of Justice may be there to close the door, but I'm here to tell him that the horse is gone from the barn. The growth is out there. It's impacting and affecting people around this province. Municipalities are unable to deal with it. Hospital and health authorities aren't able to deal with it. School boards are struggling to deal with it. Farmers are struggling to deal with it. The government has not prepared the groundwork for the growth that is taking place, and they refuse to look at managing the growth in any way.

They believe deeply in their hearts, I'm sure, in the religion of the free market. They don't believe in it as a tool or as an economic policy. They believe in it as a religion that's true always and forever, and they refuse to acknowledge that there may be exceptions from time to time when the free market does not meet the needs of the economy or of the people or even of business. So you have small businesses who are now hurting badly because they can't find labour.

You know, I heard recently about a restaurant in one of the towns that I visited that had to go out of business because they can't hire staff. You've got big corporations like McDonald's and Tim Hortons that are advertising for staff, offering scholarships. Well, those are big, multinational corporations, Mr. Speaker, and they're able to advertise for staff. But the mom-and-pop businesses, the small farmers, the small-business people around this province are really, really squeezed. Why? Because of this government's single-minded determination to dig up all of the tar sands as fast as they can, refine it regardless of the consequences, and pump it down to the United States to feed the United States' addiction with oil.

A former Premier of this province, Peter Lougheed, had suggested that we should moderate the pace of development because he, unlike the current Conservative crop, is not a religious believer in the free market system. I'm sure that he does believe in the free market system, but he can see that there is a need from time to time to manage the growth.

Why should we be in such a hurry to dig up all the tar sands just as fast as we can, refine it, and pump it down to the United States? This resource, Mr. Speaker, belongs not just to this generation, I would remind the government. It belongs to all future generations and needs to be managed in their interests as well. It's no good if we can buy lakefront property in B.C. and have giant Hummer vehicles and great big homes and so on in our generation if our grandchildren

have nothing left. But the government doesn't seem to have thought of that. They seem to think that this will go on and on forever. Well, I assure them that it will not go on and on forever.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk a little bit about housing as well because this is a clear example of where a religious belief in the free market does not serve people well. When the economy grows, rents rise and there's a shortage of housing. There's a great lag time before new housing is brought on, and in the meantime people suffer because there isn't housing for them, or they can't afford the housing that does exist. So we have the shame of tent cities popping up in Fort McMurray, in parks. We have people who, even though they're working, are homeless.

So, Mr. Speaker, this government should be ashamed of itself, and this budget ought not to have been necessary. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wish to rise under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the hon. member because he brings up the fact that they were telling us months and months ago that school boards were entering into a deficit and that the first one was Edmonton public. I wonder if the hon. member has looked at, as a percentage of the funding envelope for instruction, what the cost of salaries and benefits has done over the last number of years. I can tell the hon. member that 13 years ago it was somewhere around 80 per cent. Today I've got school boards who write to me and show me that their average cost for salaries and benefits is around 92 per cent of the funding envelope.

Here's an hon. member who wonders why boards are having some difficulty, when the very board that he talks about is the first one that went to 23.8 hours of instructional time per week, thereby necessitating the additional hiring of, I think, about 1,400 teachers throughout Alberta to cover the time for the spares of the other teachers who were, in fact, in the classroom. So he should probably look at what the efficiency has been over the years rather than what the funding has been.

4:10

Mr. Mason: Well, to respond to that, this government is responsible for the operation of education and has legislation in place regarding school boards and labour legislation and all of those other things. If it was just one school board, it might be an excuse. But it's a lot of school boards, Mr. Speaker, and it's a lot of health authorities, and it's a lot of municipalities, and it's a lot of housing. So his excuse is flimsy at best and is clearly just an attempt by his government to escape responsibility for the crisis that they have created.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone else under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a great opportunity to speak because we're already talking on education. The Minister of Advanced Education alluded to perhaps school boards overextending themselves. I happened to be on the board at that time with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and at that point the majority of the schools' money did go into supplies, equipment, services, as well as salaries. About 85 to 90 per cent is eaten up by salaries. Some schools were in fact budgeting as high as 91, 92 per cent. Recognizing that fact, we ensured that they capped the clawback; whether they released some people from their contracts, the bottom line was that you could not go over 90 per cent because it was just going to end up in an obvious deficit. There was less than 8 per cent, then, to dedicate to supplies, equipment, and services.

Basically, the whole budget was dedicated to salaries. It didn't make much sense. So they made sure – and it still is a policy, if I am correct – that they cannot budget beyond 90 per cent. Between 85 and 90 per cent would be an ideal operating budget within elementary, junior high, and high schools.

Mr. Elsalhy: If they run a deficit, would they get supplementary supply?

Mr. Bonko: No, they do not get supplementary supply if they run a deficit. They have to pay off that deficit, whether they cut back in custodial hours, whether they cut back in the basics, such as librarians, custodians, some of the support staff.

Mr. Elsalhy: They do fundraising.

Mr. Bonko: No, they cannot fund raise either, and that's another misconception perhaps.

I'd like to talk about my ministry that I didn't get a chance to talk about last night, which is Sustainable Resource Development. Sustainable Resource Development is asking for an additional increase of \$251,503,000: \$231 million is for forest fire costs, and \$20 million is to survey, which they do plenty of, and apparently for control of the mountain pine beetle.

Well, back in the spring when this ministry was asking for their first allotment of money, we on this side with a vision, which we were accused of having, said that, in fact, with supplementary supply they continue to ask for money after they shortchange themselves during the budget. They always underestimate, and this has been going on for years.

I'll give some case in point. In 2002-2003 the budget was \$227 million. In 2003-2004 they were under by about \$128 million, and in the next year \$124 million. They continue to come back to the cup because they know that it's going to be full because of the fact that our economy is doing so well. They realize that they don't have to budget efficiently. Other households have to budget because they don't have extra money. They just can't go to the bank, open the vault and say: "You know what? I need a loan to get me to the next banking day." Unlike this government here. They know that they can always go to the bank; they can go to the trough, whatever you want to call it. The supply continues to flow in. We're in a very fortunate position that we do have that supply. Times are good.

But we should be managing our resources. We should be managing our budgets far, far better, showing some leadership to all Albertans. I'm sure that this isn't a new thing when I talk about the fact that debt not just in Alberta communities or Canadian communities but worldwide is astronomical. So we ought to be showing some leadership, being able to stay within our budgeted amounts.

Like I said, the budget here, the base budget, has continued to be very low; they've not accurately predicted or forecasted for many years. You ask the question, and you don't get an answer. That's just the way it is. We can't predict whether we're going to have a large rainfall or whether we're going to have severe fires, but we can tell pretty much by looking at the almanac. Perhaps some of us have read that before. It gives us an indication. We can tell by our spring what it's going to be like. This year has been no different than any other year except that perhaps we've had far more forest fires. That's why we're asking for \$231 million more in firefighting costs.

Just this spring we asked for equipment for firefighting, and I thought it was going to be for perhaps planes or something, but we ended up leasing some bombers and that. Some of these bombers had some fatalities. I believe that was the case there just this spring.

Mr. Elsalhy: We're buying planes for business.

Mr. Bonko: We're buying planes for business. That's right.

So the biggest question is: why does the ministry not budget for wildfire operations a little bit more realistically so that budget figures are more appropriate to the actual amount spent at the end of the year, so we have an idea of exactly how it's being spent? What steps do they take to ensure that the efficiencies at the wildfires or the forest fires are kept in line? I'm not sure.

Talk about the mountain pine beetle. We're asking for another \$20 million. Well, back in the spring the ministry was saying that, you know, they're doing everything they can to ensure and allocate money to fight this dreaded disease aside from hoping for cold weather. They're monitoring on the ground. They're working closely with B.C.

Mr. Elsalhy: Now they're pointing fingers.

Mr. Bonko: Yeah. Now they're pointing fingers.

It appears that the government finally may be taking this a little bit more seriously, and they're trying to put some more money into it. Finally they're committing more than just a token amount, which they did in the spring and the year before that with a million dollars coupled with the federal investment because they were only giving a million dollars at that point. Now we're up to \$20 million. But I think this could be a little bit too late.

Can the minister explain what actions exactly are going to be taken with the money? What other plans are being considered with regard to that additional \$20 million that wasn't earlier budgeted? The mountain pine beetle, as he said many, many times, is a natural infestation. Warm winters, fire suppression, and migration from B.C. have allowed this phenomenon to continue to grow. It's unfortunate. But, you know, burning of trees, harvesting infested wood, or prescribed burns are about the only ideas or initiatives that we've got so far.

The money is going to be all right, but is it going to go far enough? I think we've been calling on this action, as I've said in the past, and we'll continue to call on the government to protect this forest and this valuable commodity which employs more than 49,000 people in its billions of dollar industry.

When we had an opportunity to go up to some of the pulp mill plants, we realized that SRD works closely with the ministries and some of the businesses out there. In fact, if this fire isn't raging out of control near any township, causing no concern to life, buildings, why not let it burn, then, instead of fighting it? As I said, this is an ethical question. They said: "This is wrong. We can talk about this for a long, long time. You know what? This is valuable money that we're just going to let sit here and go up in flames." So they said: "You know what? We can't agree with that particular one." They said, "We've got a concern with that one." We said: "It's an ethical question. Do you let it burn, or do you not let it burn?" I believe under the ministry you have a bid that you can have allowable burns in the area. You do have allowable burns in the area, that you can in fact allow to burn instead of fighting every little bit.

Now, the minister is indicating that that perhaps is not the case, but I believe that is the case. You can't fight every single solitary fire out there.

Mr. Elsalhy: It has to be contained.

Mr. Bonko: Yeah. It's got to be contained.

The fact is, you know, if some of this fire is taking place near where the pine beetle is coming in, would it be prudent to let it burn, or would you fight it? So you fight it, you save the forest, you save the resource, only to have in the spring or at some time over the course of the year the beetles being able to come through and

destroy the forest. So now you've got a double-edged sword here. You've pinned yourself against fighting the fire, saving the resource, saving the commodity, saving the jobs, the livelihood of the industry. Or do you allow the bugs to take it down?

4:20

This is the question I put to some of the foresters out there. What do you do? Do you let the fire burn along the eastern slopes, where the beetle is coming in, or do you fight it? This is part of the problem that B.C. is facing. They've done such a good job in suppressing the forest fires in B.C. Over the course of the 100 years prior to this forest fires, you know, took a natural course. They didn't have people to fight them. Long before forest firefighting was set up, it took a natural course. Because we've begun to be so good at fighting them, we've allowed this infestation to get a better handle on it and take control instead of us having control over it.

Communities that perhaps we can talk about that are ravaged right now in B.C., a larger area than New Brunswick – and they're going to continue to remove the entire timber supply in those areas – would be Quesnel or Prince George. These areas are a good example of what happens if we're not in fact being prudent with our forest firefighting measures or, better yet, with fighting the pine beetle.

We talk about, you know: let's watch and see what the weather does. I don't think that's enough. I think now we have to be a little bit more aggressive, and we have to put more money into it. This ministry has to employ more people on the ground to do more monitoring, as they say, or to do more cutting and prescribed burns or maybe change the agreements. Even though they're not part of the plans right now, have those companies go over and harvest those infected or potentially affected areas right now, during the course of the year, or before it becomes infected. They can go back later on and take care of the other areas. I know we've got an ability to allow some flexibility within agreements, or at least we should have. So that would be one specific piece I would talk to the minister about.

Other priorities. Perhaps we could talk about SRD improving the enforcement roll of the Natural Resources Conservation Board by hiring more field officers and training more as well. I know we have not been successful in that area. We continue to need more and more in that area as well. Perhaps they're being drawn into the oil and gas industry like a lot of the other communities and large cities and, in fact, in half the country. You know: come to Alberta because we've got a lot here to offer you. We don't have affordable housing. We don't have affordable prices on homes or rents, but we've got a lot to offer you. This is a problem. We've asked for these people to come to Alberta with the signs of money and streets paved of gold like at McMurray. There's the perfect example. Yet when they get there, I think they're a little bit shocked. They're a little bit horrified at some of the conditions. We talked to some Americans that have gone up there, and they can't believe that this is what the prices are, that this is what they're led to believe is affordable.

You know, the Premier asks: come to Alberta. Other ministries have always asked for the economic opportunities. Come to Alberta. We continue to ask these people to come, but when they've come, we've got no opportunities for them to be able to live. Affordable housing in some cases is two years on the waiting list, and then the people aren't able to have their homes inspected. We don't have the ability to be able to even have the people registering. We've got such a backlog. This is something we've asked for, though. So did we create our own problem here? You've got to wonder about it.

Other priorities for SRD: more forestry officers, opening more offices, hiring more scientists to enforce the Forests Act regulations and the conservation initiatives, and redeveloping recovery plans to

designated areas for special habitats. We could in fact ensure that some of the species that are supposedly in danger or at risk – it actually does take enforcement or at least putting into play. So I've talked a little bit about my area, Sustainable Resource Development, which I wouldn't have had an opportunity to talk about last night.

We could talk about another hot topic which seemed to be one of the reasons why we did come back into this session, which is because we didn't in fact properly plan for the looming crisis, we'll call it, before the budget time of September 30, when school boards have the projected enrolments and they submit the monies that they need to be able to operate for the entire year. They don't get to come back to the government and say: look, we're short here. They have to make their submissions based on enrolments by September 30. So before September 30 comes, and we have the candidates all seeking the leadership and then having an embarrassing question, we're here redeveloping a strategy again to talk about the priorities.

We'll talk about some of the schools within my constituency. Some that have placed high on the raw scores need the investments, need to ensure that they have the ability to track the students so they're not closing schools. You know, Dickinsfield junior high, the one that my daughter went to, didn't do too bad, but it can always use some money. Apparently, it could use about \$350,000. With the escalating costs of construction and the overall supplies, equipment, and demand, it's going to be more than that, so what some of the schools, in fact, have had allocated to them for original estimates is going to be thrown out the window. Look at the costs of just completing the Anthony Henday or some of the stuff down there in Calgary I'm not specific with. The overrun costs are just outrageous. Are we going to be able to allow some contingency plans for already preapproved projects for schools to ensure that they're able to meet that same scope of work required but not adversely affect the board directly? They can't. They don't have and they won't have the ability to pull this out of their own budget. So they've got to rely on a government that's originally given them the grant money to be able to fulfill this particular piece.

Killarney junior high school in my constituency has received a poorer rating. It's mid-500s, and it needs over a million dollars, \$1.4 million at last estimate a few years ago. Now, I mean, I went to Killarney junior high a number of years ago, and it's a school that's continuing to grow. It's got alternative programs and continues to attract new students through these measures, but we've got to realize that \$1.4 million is just not going to cut it. Again, like I said, the spiralling costs and construction costs if you're able to find the trade workers are going to bump that number probably up to \$2 million. Another concern right there.

Mee-Yah-Noh, just south of that, is one of the feeder schools. Now, this school is definitely older. It's about the 1960s. You know, if you or I have had a place since 1960, we're going to put a little bit of money into it because there's no way you could . . . [Mr. Bonko's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available for anyone.

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Coumts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to address the Assembly this afternoon and talk about the need for the \$252 million of supplementary estimates that we need for the rest of this fiscal year and that Sustainable Resource Development is under control of.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you rising under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Coumts: No, I was not.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Was there anybody else?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, I heard you say, "Seeing none." You were going to acknowledge somebody else.

The Deputy Speaker: I saw none. I was questioned on it, so I thought someone wanted to rise. Please proceed.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just put it this way for the hon. member and for all Albertans and for members of this House. This government and this minister take a prudent approach to budgeting for wildfires. We take a prudent approach. The base budget that we use for wildfires this year is similar to previous years. It comes in at close to \$77 million. That gets us set up with contracts for helicopters. That gets us set up with contracts for all of our firefighters that we feel that we might need for the year.

Common sense will tell anyone here and common sense will tell any Albertan that it's very, very difficult to predict forest fires. Yes, you can come up with some ideas that you could have a wet year or you could have a dry year. Last year, for example, it was fairly wet, and therefore we didn't need as much money in supplementary estimates because we didn't have as many forest fires. But, Mr. Speaker, that will tell you that the dollars will vary depending on the amount of forest fires that you have. Also, it's not just the number of forest fires but the severity of a forest fire.

This particular year has been a very, very busy year for forest fires. Our near-record levels for our driest winter and spring and extremely warm temperatures have resulted in more than 1,600 wildfires burning over 116,000 hectares of land. That's an area that would be the size of Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Calahasen: Oh, my.

Mr. Coutts: Yeah. You know how large that is.

Ms Calahasen: Yes, I do.

Mr. Coutts: Wildfires burned near the communities of Caroline, Whitecourt, Hinton, Evansburg, and Gift Lake, and on July 4 the community of Nordegg was evacuated for a total of four days when the wildfire burned within almost 1.5 kilometres close to the hamlet. During that same week low relative humidity, warm temperatures, and extreme lightning – and that's something else that we can't predict: lightning strikes – resulted in the province seeing 169 active wildfires burning on a single day. We had to have the resources in place, and we had to have resources at our disposal to look after those 169 wildfires.

4:30

The wildfire season this particular year is not officially over until October 1, meaning that we still have over one month of wildfire season left. The total amount that the department currently expects to spend on wildfires in this fiscal year is about \$308.9 million, and that will almost be a record. The \$231.5 million in additional funds is what we actually need to complete this year.

The hon. member made some comments about pine beetle, and the comments are a little confusing, but I want to say that this ministry has been very proactive and had a very busy year in dealing with mountain pine beetle. We have kept on contract through the winter a number of our firefighters to do and assist us with extensive air and ground surveys, and we will continue to do that through this year so that we can catch the infestations that happen during this summer's fly of the pine beetle. We need to do that as early as possible so that

we can cut and burn individual trees, so that we can look at large areas that would do prescribed burns.

We've had close to 14,000 infested mountain pine beetle trees that have been identified and selectively cut and burned by our forestry staff, the majority of these trees being in the Willmore wilderness park area. That's a real credit to the Department of Community Development, who has helped us establish a protocol to go in there and make sure that we don't abrogate our responsibility to the people of Alberta by letting the parks go to a brilliant red colour from pine beetle kill.

It's true, Mr. Speaker, that a new infestation has been recently identified in the north of the eastern slopes, the farthest north the mountain pine beetle has ever been in Alberta. The pine beetles that have infested not only have been identified by landowners but certainly confirmed by our forestry staff in Grande Prairie, Fox Creek, and Fairview. We're working with municipalities as well as private landowners to find the extent of the recent infestations, and we're working with the industry, which is so important in this, as well as provincial parks and protected areas and the federal government to survey and control as much as possible all of the beetle infestations. As soon as they're identified, we'll make sure that we go in there and cut and burn.

We will be training seasonal firefighters in surveying and keeping them on staff over the winter for the mountain pine beetle control. Ground surveys are being conducted this fall and will determine the number of trees infested for cut and burn treatments. Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely necessary that we remain vigilant in our efforts at limiting mountain pine beetles in our forests as Alberta's entire pine forest, which is 10 per cent of the entire area of the province of Alberta, is now at risk.

The department needs an estimated \$22.6 million in total this fiscal year to continue this battle. Mr. Speaker, our original budget for the mountain pine beetle was \$2.6 million, and that's all we needed at that particular time for the amount of trees that we had, but seeing that we have more trees infected with mountain pine beetle, this government has taken a very proactive approach and put the resources towards eradicating and stopping this pine beetle at the border of Alberta and British Columbia. These two requests make up \$251.5 million in supplementary funding.

It's done to make sure that we preserve and protect this natural resource that we have that Albertans not only enjoy seeing but that they also work in. It provides to our economy about \$12 billion worth of revenue a year, Mr. Speaker, so it's very, very important that we do the prudent thing and budget responsibly, and when we have emergencies, we can call on supplementary estimates to assist. Actually, in my opinion, you end up budgeting better when you know that the supplementary estimates are there to cover the costs of the action that's already been taken both on wildfires and on pine beetle.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Am I allowed to make a comment and question, Mr. Speaker, to the minister? I've been exposed to the beetle problem in B.C., and I would say to you, sir, that you are certainly on the right path with your burning and what you're doing. But one of the things I would emphasize to you, with all due respect, is that I think that the work of science has to go on. I would urge you, sir, with your compatriots in B.C. forestry to continue on that vein as well.

You're right. Everything you've said today I agree with. It's a very serious problem. For example, the property that I'm aware of in British Columbia: we took 200 trees off this year because we

didn't handle it properly. We should have done the slash and burn and done it in the winter, which we didn't do. We're paying the price now.

I would emphasize that the government has done so much good work in health in terms of the heart and the kind of work you've done with children and the children's hospital. I would also suggest: don't give up on the science part of this. I think that's a very important one.

The other comment I'd just like to give you is on your fish hatchery in Cold Lake. We were up there visiting, my colleague and I, and it just is a very positive experience that we had. The staff treated us so well. I hate to say this, but I never knew it existed. Let me tell you that the tour was wonderful. It's a facility everyone should see, and when you see the condition of Cold Lake, the lake itself, and how it's nurturing the well-being of the fish that are in it – I understand it's not been restocked in the last year number of years. It's held its own is what I'm trying to say, and the water is really something to behold for Alberta. So I think there's a feather you can wear in your cap, and I hope that continues to be developed.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. minister wish to respond?

Mr. Coutts: Just a quick response. Thank you very much. Our staff at the Cold Lake hatchery are very qualified staff. They work very, very hard to make sure that the hatchery provides the fish that can go into lakes. We do the science around that to make sure that Albertans can go out there and have a pleasant experience not only on the sports fishing side but also on the domestic side.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake certainly brought the fact that we need to make some improvements to the hatchery. We took the trip up there as well. I was, like you, very surprised and, actually, a little astounded that we had such a high-quality hatchery. This summer when I was in Korea, I thought I was going to learn something from the hatchery in Korea. Well, we don't have to take a back seat to anyone. We have a very, very good hatchery: quality water and good people with good science behind them to make sure that our fishing experience is a good one here. We'll continue to put the resources to that.

Your comment about not forgetting the science for mountain pine beetle is well taken. We continue to make sure that the scientists that we have on staff will continue to help us. As a matter of fact, we thought at one time that the Jack pine in northern Alberta in our boreal forest was exempt from mountain pine beetle. The scientists have said that that's not true. If the mountain pine beetle get into that Jack pine and go across the boreal forest, within the next 15 to 18 years that pine beetle could go all the way across Canada, all across the boreal forest, well into Labrador. We've advised the federal government of that. As well, B.C. has advised the federal government of that. The federal government has been participating not only, again, in some of the science but also in helping to facilitate some of the dollars to help stop the beetle. We think that this is the best stand that can be made at the high altitude between Alberta and British Columbia. So it's ongoing.

We also have to thank the ongoing presence of the science and the protocol that was put into place by British Columbia and Alberta back in early 2005 where they are participating and helping us with information and giving us support in whatever way they can. They're also supporting our industry to identify areas where mountain pine beetle could come across and the next area that we should be looking at.

So thank you for your comments.

4:40

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As many others have commented, it has been very difficult to have time to raise the kind of issues that we wish to raise given the fact that in supplementary supply there were only three and a half hours to discuss \$1.3 billion and the procedure was to go through the departments in alphabetical order. That left out the one that I want to comment on; namely, Solicitor General and Public Security. I don't think we got very far last night. It's probably still with the As in terms of the departments.

I find it lamentable that we don't have an opportunity to have a give-and-take with the minister. I'm going to comment on the appropriations bill, Bill 44, and especially the amounts of money under Solicitor General and Public Security, but I would have preferred to hear some sort of introduction or explanation from the minister about these amounts before I make my remarks. Anyway, I will proceed.

There are two parts to the monies that are being requested for Solicitor General. The capital investment of \$9,600,000 is requested for the development of an integrated province-wide strategic information technology system for police, corrections, and other public safety partners. I think this is something that's really needed. I applaud the movement towards a kind of rationalization of policing in Alberta, not to go so far as to suggest that Alberta have its own police force – many people are suspicious that that's where we're heading – but certainly to have a rationalization in terms of education, so the direction towards a police academy is something that is in the right direction.

This kind of proposal to develop an integrated strategic information technology system is quite laudable. My only two questions are: how much have municipal police forces already invested in their own information technology system, and how much are they going to actually be losing when this integrated system is put into place? I need to have more information about that. The second question about this integrated system is about the whole issue of abuse. What kind of monitoring, what kind of oversight of this integrated system will be put into place? It's easy to think about the Overtime scandal. I happened to be in the Overtime bar not too long ago, and I was reminded by the owner about that event when Edmonton police ran through their system the names of people that they were planning to catch in a sting operation. We all know about the aftermath of that. So what kind of oversight, what kind of prevention of abuse of using these computer systems will be put into place? That's all the comment I have about that portion of the money, capital investment in this technology system.

Now I want to turn to the other matter. There is \$4 million being requested to provide an interim solution to the overcrowding at the Edmonton Remand Centre until a new one is built. According to press releases, I guess there's going to be a new remand centre to the tune of \$308 million, although I'm not sure how that budgeting process unfolds. There's nothing in Infrastructure this year to cover that. I expect that there will be amounts from Infrastructure in the years to come, but a new Edmonton remand centre wouldn't be built until 2012, which raises all kinds of issues in terms of what is to be done in the meantime. So the \$4 million asked for in the appropriation bill is for some interim solution to deal with overcrowding. Some of the inmates will be transferred to the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre, and sentenced inmates from Fort Saskatchewan will then be transferred to the federal Grande Cache Institution and so on.

I am not disputing the need for a new remand centre. I've raised numerous questions in the past, both in question period and before the Public Accounts Committee, about the terrible conditions in the remand centre in Edmonton. The problem is obvious. We have an institution, the Edmonton Remand Centre, which was built in 1979 to hold 332 inmates and now has more than 700.

It's not just the Edmonton Remand Centre. We forget easily that the Calgary Remand Centre, which was built in 1993 to hold 361 prisoners, now holds more than 500. That is a tremendous problem too, and I don't read anywhere about suggestions about what to do with the Calgary Remand Centre. I understand that there are 14 different units in the Calgary Remand Centre, including a number of medium security units for the general population, maximum security, female unit, disciplinary segregation, a suicide-watch unit, et cetera. Again, double-bunking occurs in the remand centre in Calgary just as much as in the Edmonton Remand Centre.

I am quite disturbed by this particular statistic. The average stay in the remand centre in Calgary is 14 days, but it is estimated that 15 to 20 per cent of inmates stay for one year, and 5 per cent stay for two years. That, to me, raises all kinds of questions about what we are actually doing to people through the remand centre. I mean, if most people in the remand centre are waiting for trial, and they have to wait a whole year or even longer, then in effect we are punishing them before they have a trial, and I think that's quite unacceptable.

The conditions are obviously lamentable in the Calgary Remand Centre and the Edmonton Remand Centre and the Red Deer Remand Centre and other institutions throughout the province. So my question is: what kind of consultation is taking place, especially with all the players in the justice system, to examine the whole picture, not just the need for one new remand centre but the needs overall?

I just want to say a few things about that because I think that if we don't do that, then a new remand centre is just a stopgap measure and doesn't deal with the real problem. I don't want to see a situation in which we're rushing to a solution before we have looked at all the different possibilities.

Given the trend of Conservative governments, especially federal and provincial, demanding that there be changes to the Criminal Code – for example, mandatory minimum sentences, less use of conditional sentencing, limiting conditional release, all of which eliminates judicial discretion, taking a lot of power and wisdom away from judges – that whole approach of Conservative policy guarantees that there will even be more offenders going to jail.

Now, it's interesting. There was an MLA review of the correctional system in Alberta, submitted in November 2002. That review was responding to a completely different situation, I assume. It seemed in reading the review that that was a response to complaints that actually we were too soft on prisoners, that they had "club-fed" situations in the correctional system, so most of the recommendations tried to make things tougher. The report also states that because of the use of conditional sentencing, the demands are not so great because there are other alternatives, so some youth detention centres were actually closed.

4:50

Of course, the situation now has shifted again as Conservative policies are recommending against conditional sentencing, so the demands on the system have changed and are much greater than before and will be greater. In fact, the MLA report which I referred to says that

adult offender custody populations, especially offenders on remand, have been rising during the past year. In 2001-02, the remand population increased by 23 per cent and the sentenced population in Alberta facilities grew by 9 per cent over the previous year.

Mr. Speaker, that is going to continue to increase because of the policies of the federal government and the provincial government in Alberta, and more and more people are going to be incarcerated. Really, if it's the trend that the prison population will increase exponentially, then a new remand centre is not what we need. Right now we need an urgent review of the whole system.

Again, it's a question of planning. If this is the direction that the governments are going in, then we need to have greater planning for

the future. What about the other facilities? Are we going to have to have other prisons being built, more prisons and larger prisons? It's a huge, huge issue, and I would like to see more study, more reports, more analysis of the whole situation than I'm seeing right now.

I'm asking that the whole issue be seen in a wider perspective, not just focusing on the one issue of a new remand centre. I mean, it leaves the question: who are the inmates in the remand centre? How many inmates in remand are there because there actually is no room in some of the other prisons like the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre?

Now, I have a personal experience along that line because I visited someone in the remand centre here who was actually sentenced for a white-collar crime of defrauding his employer. The judge wanted to make an example of him, so he was sentenced, but he stayed for a number of months in the remand centre because there were no cells open in the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre. I mean, he was put in with violent offenders. Here was a person that committed a white-collar crime and mercifully he wasn't double-bunked with somebody who was accused of a more serious crime. What are the solutions here if not moving in the direction of building more prisons?

Who is in the remand centre? Now, my assumption has been that the remand population consists of those who are waiting for trial and not, as the hon. minister said to this House, that if they are in remand, they must have done something wrong. We have no right to say that about someone who is waiting for his trial. Eventually they may be found guilty, but they also may be found innocent. What we should not be doing is punishing them before they have their trial. That's why the terrible conditions in the remand centre are so important. I mean, we have people there waiting for trial living in terrible conditions. That goes against the fundamental principle of justice that people should be considered innocent until proven guilty.

Who is in the remand centre? Well, the evidence seems to indicate that there are a disproportionate number of aboriginal men in the remand centre. In fact, the aboriginal population in Alberta is about 40 per cent in terms of inmates in provincial jails, and that raises all kinds of issues, which I'm not going to go into now. It leads one to think about a greater need for making ourselves aware of cultural differences, of the need for appointment of aboriginal Crown prosecutors and aboriginal judges and dealing with the whole aboriginal population in a different way. It seems to me that if there is a disproportionate number of aboriginal people in the remand centre, maybe it's the whole issue of: well, they may not appear for trial so keep them in prison, have the bail high so that they can't afford to pay it, and keep them there. Now, I find that quite unacceptable. We need to have different kinds of approaches understanding the aboriginal population.

Well, Mr. Speaker, my time is up, and I have much, much more to say. Again, this is not adequate, so someone ask me a question.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wishing to rise under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member appears to be talking with some degree of expertise on the population in prisons. But having very recently, about a year or a year and a half ago, done a thorough review of all correctional facilities in Alberta, I know for a fact – the first question: has he read the report? Because as a critic he should have. If he has read the report, he would have known that Alberta's correctional facilities are about 50 or 60 per cent vacant right now.

My supplemental to that question will be: how does he arrive at the conclusion that we may have to or are in a position to have to

build more prisons? The reason why we have 50 or 60 per cent vacancy is not because we have fewer offences but because of some of the sentencing trends toward alternative sentences. So how does he arrive at this conclusion when the facts clearly don't support it?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to respond?

Dr. B. Miller: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have any statistics, but the money that's being requested for . . . [interjections] I read your report. The money that's being requested is to transfer inmates from Fort Saskatchewan to Grande Cache. Now, Grande Cache is a federal institution. Why are we moving people from Fort Saskatchewan to Grande Cache? Why don't we send them to Lethbridge or other provincial correctional centres? I think the issue of space in provincial prisons, correctional centres, is a serious issue.

Also, I think the situation is changing because, as I've said, of alternatives. Is the hon. member saying that this government is going to continue to emphasize alternative sentencing, restorative justice approaches? Because that is the issue. It seems to me that the issue of dealing with our burgeoning prison population is to reduce the incarcerated population by turning to other measures. I mean, building our way out of the correctional crisis – and I think there is a correctional crisis; it's here and it's going to get worse in the future – is not the answer.

Actually, I'm glad the hon. member raised the issue with me because I think we need to actually go back and look at the MLA review. It was looking at other possibilities of alternative sentencing. That's what we need. We need to find ways of keeping people out of prison. We need to find ways of providing other ways; for example, supervision within the community. If it's a property crime against an employer, surely the issue of restitution comes into it. Why throw someone into prison? Have that person restore what they stole to their employer and serve in the community and do some community service. There are all sorts of ways in which we can deal with people, especially first-time offenders, to make sure that the population in prison doesn't get bigger and bigger and bigger.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to participate under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, the hon. Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity to enter the debate this afternoon. Our ministry's vision is to ensure that Albertans have safe and secure communities in which to live, work, and raise their families, and we require funding for two very important initiatives that further support that vision. In conjunction with Infrastructure and Transportation we recently announced plans to replace the Edmonton Remand Centre. Construction of the new facility is expected to take four to five years, and until the centre is complete, overcrowding at the Edmonton Remand Centre will continue to put the safety of staff and inmates at risk. So we need the \$4 million to help alleviate that situation.

5:00

These funds will allow us to transfer provincially sentenced offenders currently housed in the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre to the federal Grande Cache Institution. Moving these offenders will free up space at Fort Saskatchewan to house more inmates from the Edmonton Remand Centre, therefore relieving some of the pressure and overcrowding at the Remand Centre. This requires \$1.6 million for additional staff in Fort Saskatchewan to address security issues associated with housing remanded inmates,

\$500,000 to transport inmates from Fort Saskatchewan to Grande Cache as well as the additional cost to transport remand inmates from Fort Saskatchewan to Edmonton for court appearances, and finally, Mr. Speaker, \$1.9 million in per diem payments to Correctional Service Canada, which operates the Grande Cache facility.

Mr. Speaker, we are also developing a new central crime database for our law enforcement agencies. The five-year, \$100 million commitment by the Alberta government will enhance the safety and security of Albertans. In fiscal year '06-07 \$9.6 million will begin the initial groundwork to start moving the project forward. This project will develop a comprehensive computer system that will improve the ability of law enforcement agencies, including police, sheriffs, and corrections, to share important criminal intelligence information. The systems will allow easier input and access to that information from anywhere in the province and should provide real-time information to front-line officers. So these two initiatives are vital to ensure that Albertans continue to live in safe and secure communities.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora mentioned the fact of who was actually studying the issue regarding this IT system. I can let him know that there has been an executive team in place from the police services as well as from our ministry and from RGE working together to look at the future as to what type of model would be in place. As well, I want to remind the hon. member and this Assembly that the population of Alberta is smaller than the size of Toronto, where they have one system for their police service. The issue that we have is eight major police services in Alberta that have eight different systems. So the issue is: how do we connect them all together? How do we provide that information and that sharing of information and resources to all of our police services throughout Alberta? Even though we have geographic issues and boundaries to deal with, the size of the police service in Toronto is, in fact, larger than the size of our 5,300 or 5,400 police officers in Alberta. So we want to obviously take that next step, and this government has provided that leadership in moving in that direction to ensure the safety and security of our communities.

I do want to touch on a few of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora's comments regarding the capital for other remand centres. Of course, there are issues that he mentioned. We are looking at the capital planning process for 2007-2008. Actually, we're meeting with the hon. minister for capital infrastructure planning regarding those requests and those needs that we have in other centres; for example, in the Calgary Remand Centre and the Calgary Correctional Centre as well. Those are going to be developed over the next year, and of course we have to go through the government process for capital plans. So we are aware of those needs. We are looking at those projects as we move forward in the coming years.

I had some concern with the hon. member blaming the Conservative government for filling facilities, and on the other hand my Liberal counterpart's comments were that he wants less individuals in the jails and to put them back on the street. The issue is that these individuals have been remanded either by a judge or by a justice of the peace to ensure the safety and security of the public, and that's why they're being held in custody. There are murderers. There are pedophiles. There are sexual assaults. There are rapists. There are assaults causing bodily harm, shootings, and stabbings that occur every weekend and almost on a daily basis throughout Alberta. These people are a risk to the general public, and that's why they're being held in remand. No, they haven't been convicted. Yes, they may sit in remand for two years, but it's better having a murderer sit in remand than having that murderer, who could commit another offence similar to that, exposed to the public. Our goal as the Conservative government is to ensure that we can provide the leadership and the facilities and the storage of remanded individuals

and/or those individuals who are sentenced into correctional facilities.

I applaud the federal government. This Conservative federal government is looking at new initiatives, ensuring that there are deterrents in place for future potential offenders to look at, saying, "Do I want to spend five years in jail for this offence?" whereas right now they may spend 18 months and they're kicked out, or they used to. So I applaud this federal Conservative government for the initiatives they're taking and hope to see a lot more this fall when Parliament opens up again.

Mr. Speaker, I think that those are some of the comments that I have other than, obviously, the dollars that we're asking for in Solicitor General and Public Security are smaller dollars but will have a huge impact on the service level we provide within the ministry and, as well, to ensure the protection and safety of Albertans as well as the staff that we have in our ministry and the inmates and/or the remanded individuals themselves.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is general support in my constituency of Edmonton-Manning for the remand centre. Certainly, there's been a long number of comments over the last year or two about the fact that some justices of the peace and such are not putting people that maybe should be put into some incarceration because of the fact that the remand centre has been too packed.

However, when the issue of the remand centre was brought into public light as to where it would be sited, this became something of an issue in my riding. The mayor of Edmonton mentioned a site near the Alberta Hospital, which is in Edmonton-Manning, which is my riding, and this has created a great deal of consternation among the residents of my riding, many who have seen the Edmonton maximum institution, Alberta Hospital, Henwood, and other institutions brought there. They're important institutions, but I think the feeling is that we've got our fair share.

There is opposition, which is very clear, to the fact of placing it at that particular site. I must make that clear. Ninety-nine per cent of many communications which I've received are against the siting near Alberta Hospital or, indeed, in having some suggestions, you know, from members of the Edmonton Police Service that it really only makes sense to have it downtown because there is one there already. They would be building on. There is land that could be made available from the city. My question to the minister is: will you ensure that it doesn't go near Alberta Hospital and that we could maybe see it downtown? Take the interests of the police service members and others who think that, as you say, murderers, pedophiles, rapists, thieves being transported on a regular basis to the courthouse, to the main police headquarters in Edmonton might be a mistake, that we don't want them travelling daily on our roads.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Before I have the hon. minister respond, I'd like to remind the hon. Member for St. Albert that we're not in committee.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning for those questions. I take his concerns to heart. I, too, have received a number of e-mails from residents in Edmonton, in the northeast area, in and around the Edmonton hospital. Obviously that is one of the locations due to the amount of government land that is available to us, but we are

looking at other sites. Our department has recently met with the mayor and I believe council in Fort Saskatchewan to look at existing land within the Fort Saskatchewan complex as well as just across the street from it as well as looking at other opportunities and other government-owned land in and around the Edmonton area, around EYOC and other land in the downtown area as well.

5:10

There are a number of options that we are looking at and, again, looking at what the facility should look like, how it should be provided, how it should be housed, and obviously looking at the long term, the number of inmates that a remand centre can hold, to ensure that we have that space available for 25 to 30 years down the road so that we have a clear vision of ensuring that when we've reached 2030 or 2035, in fact, that facility will still be in use and the ability to provide a sufficient and safe service not only to the inmates but to the staff and corrections officers as well that work in those facilities. So we are looking at those.

I take the member's questions to heart and will let our department know, and obviously we'll keep the hon. member in the loop as we move through the process.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods wish to participate in the debate?

Mrs. Mather: No.

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

Mr. Renner: In debate on the bill?

The Deputy Speaker: In debate on the bill.

Mr. Renner: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be very pleased to discuss the request that's included in this bill as it applies to Municipal Affairs. As you know, \$20.4 million of these estimates apply to Municipal Affairs. The lion's share of that is \$13.4 million, which is the first increment of a \$50 million commitment that the government has made to reinstate the underground storage tank program.

This was a very successful program that assisted many small-business operators and municipalities throughout the province to deal with the contamination that they found themselves with as a result of leaking gas tanks from old technology. That program had a limitation both in total dollars, which was met, as well as individual claims that owners could make. There was a \$10,000 grant available to do the initial investigation to determine the extent of any contamination and then up to a \$100,000 grant that's available to actually deal with the contamination itself. Most of the sites in the province fall within that \$100,000 range.

However, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of sites that have been identified through the first program that the contamination actually exceeded the \$100,000, and additional funds were or will be needed to deal with the decontamination of those sites. The program that we'll be putting in place as a result of these new dollars that become available increases the amount from \$100,000 to \$150,000. The original \$10,000 stays in place. So an individual may be able to now have up to \$160,000 to deal with the decontamination of leaks that have been created by leaking underground tanks.

That necessitates two things, Mr. Speaker. It requires us to go back through our files and determine if there were sites that were not remediated because the landowner did not have the personal resources to go beyond the hundred thousand, didn't want to start on

the hundred thousand knowing full well that it wasn't going to be enough. There are some other sites where the owner of the contaminated site did in fact pay personal finances or small-business finances to go beyond the hundred thousand. The bulk of the \$13.4 million that we have before us today will go to deal with those two situations: to go back and have a look at sites that were not dealt with because there wasn't sufficient funds and also to retroactively compensate some of the individuals who, had the program been available to them, obviously would have been compensated up to \$150,000.

The rest of the \$50 million will come in the next two construction years. We anticipate that there will be as many as another 600 sites throughout the province that will be identified. Applications will come forward, and we'll deal with those on a first-come, first-served basis based on the applications that come in.

The \$50 million, if you do the math, may or may not be sufficient, depending upon the severity of the contamination. I have made a commitment as minister responsible for this program that if at the end of the three years the \$50 million still has not dealt with all of the contaminated sites in the province, I will again request an extension and additional funding, so that we can continue to deal with things.

The reason we're not doing it all at once, Mr. Speaker, is that this is a fairly sophisticated industry. There are constraints within the industry, and you can only do so much in a construction season. So we anticipate about \$15 million a year over three years, and that's how you come up to the \$50 million.

We also have included, Mr. Speaker, \$3.5 million so that we can institute disaster recovery programs as a result of severe weather conditions that have occurred in Alberta in 2006. One occurred in southern Alberta that resulted in about \$2.5 million in damages resulting from overland flooding. Part of that will be paid to municipalities to compensate them for the costs that they have incurred in dealing with the situation.

I know I can use as an example – the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat will be very familiar because it's in his constituency – the town of Bow Island. It had significant damages. This huge cloud just opened up over top of them and dumped a substantial amount of rain. It overwhelmed their storm sewer system. They had to bring vacuum trucks from all over the country to try and deal with the situation. Those are the kinds of things that a municipality can be compensated for. There also may well have been some incidental damage to the storm sewer system. As well as that, because the storm sewer system backs up, you end up having actual overland flooding, where water enters into homes over the top of the foundation, not through the bottom, which is a sewer backup. That sewer backup is a damage that can be recovered through a normal homeowner's insurance policy. Overland flooding, on the other hand, is not something that insurance companies are responsible for, and that's why we step in with a disaster recovery program.

There was also an incident in the city of Edmonton on June 15 that had similar results, and there's \$1 million included to assist the city of Edmonton and the residents of Edmonton that incurred damages as a result of that incident as well.

Finally, there's \$3.4 million in this request to deal with the ongoing administrative costs for the previous 2005 disaster recovery program. This is a cost-shared program. We actually lay out the money, and then we will in turn eventually recover it from the federal government. So we're essentially creating an accounts receivable in this \$3.4 million either next year as this file is closed or perhaps even a subsequent year because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, some of the damages that resulted from last year's storms are going to take as many as two construction seasons to repair. We won't be able to close that file off until all of the damages have been

calculated and repaired. Once we do, we will submit an accounting to the federal government. They'll reimburse us, and this \$3.4 million will be returned.

That, Mr. Speaker, is an explanation of how Municipal Affairs came to request \$20.4 million.

The Deputy Speaker: Anyone wishing to rise on 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that there are so many of these – what are they called? – brownfield sites all throughout the province needing the tank sites remediation program and that if I heard you right, you're going to have to request more money after the \$50 million is used up, I don't understand the relationship between asking for this extra money and the ongoing budgeting process. How is it included? Shouldn't it be included in the long-term budgeting process for the department?

5:20

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, in the year 2000 the program was introduced that I referred to earlier, that had a total budget of \$60 million. That \$60 million has been expended in totality, so without introducing a new program, creating a new budget, we're unable to deal with anything that hasn't already been dealt with under the old program. This is a new program that will increase the grants to \$150,000. Part of this initial budget will compensate individuals under the old program who paid more than the \$100,000, up to the \$150,000. Part of it will deal with sites that have already been identified. Much of the research has already been conducted, but it was obvious that the \$100,000 under the old program was not going to do the job, so that's part of it. The balance will be used for other sites that either had not applied under the old program or applied after all of the available funds had already been allocated.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, anyone wish to participate in the debate? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Stevens: Briefly, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Justice is seeking approval for an additional \$3.6 million to pay justices of the peace in anticipation that the 2003 to 2008 Justice of the Peace Compensation Commission will submit its recommendations to the government in this fiscal year, 2006-2007. The next JPCC was due in 2003, but what happened was that there was a delay because the justices of the peace challenged the provision of the government's response to the 1998 to 2003 JPCC, which, of course, is short for the Justice of the Peace Compensation Commission.

The Supreme Court of Canada ultimately rendered a decision in favour of the government, and we believe that we're now in a position to proceed with the 2003 compensation commission for the justices of the peace. The amount of \$3.6 million is our best estimate as to what the outcome of that particular mandatory process will be, which we will be required to pay in this particular fiscal year. So it's a bit of housekeeping which we can now do as a result of a successful court case in favour of the government.

Those are the comments I have with respect to the matter. I put them on the record at this point in time because I had not had an opportunity, and I don't think it's a matter that the critics on the opposition bench will spend much time on.

In any event, at this time, Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence I'd like to call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]