

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 12, 2004**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 04/05/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Grant us daily awareness of the precious gift of life which has been given to us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Mr. Dunford: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in your gallery are a couple of eminent gentlemen. Not to single out anyone by starting first, I'll start with Jim Horsman, who sat in one of these places along here at one time. Jim Horsman is here today representing the University of Lethbridge, and I want to indicate to him that all of us in Lethbridge and southern Alberta appreciate his efforts.

With him today is Bill Cade, the president of the University of Lethbridge. Bill has shown to now be a great asset to the university, a great asset to southern Alberta and, actually, to Alberta generally.

We thank both of them for coming today, and we would like the Legislative Assembly to show them an appropriate applause for their visit today.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four very special guests. Colleen Quartly joined my office recently and provides a warm smile and greeting at our door as well as over our telephone in addition to all of the other workload that she shares in our office, but her most important job, of course, is her role as mother to Sydney. Sydney will be one on Friday, so it's important that she be at the Legislature early to start her career learning about government.

With Colleen and Sydney are Colleen's mother, Rose Desjardins, a retired psychiatric nurse with more than 30 years of service residing in London, Ontario, and Colleen's aunt, Elaine Arcand, a retired schoolteacher with more than 30 years of service residing in Sturgeon Falls, Ontario. Both her mother and aunt arrived in Edmonton today and have plans to visit Banff national park, Fort Edmonton, the Muttart Conservatory, and all the wonders that are Alberta.

All three have now risen, and I'd like them to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the House 14 visitors from Spruce Grove from the Living Waters Christian Academy, which is a private school in my riding that does a great job

and is currently undergoing some expansion. The students are accompanied by teacher Mr. Mike Janzen and parent helpers Carole Ibsen and Ross Hogg. I would like them to rise in the public gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Mr. Broda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 22 members of the Redwater seniors' association. I'd like to recognize their team leader, Mrs. Mable Cook, and driver Mr. Burt McNeil. For some it's their first time in this Legislature, and I had the opportunity of having lunch with them this afternoon. This group of seniors are great supporters of mine and of this government, and I truly appreciate all that they have done for this province and for their own communities. The commitment that they put in is greatly appreciated. I'd also like to thank their tour guide, who has done a splendid job on the tour with them this afternoon. I'd like to ask them now to rise – they're seated in the members' gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Danyluk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My group isn't in yet, but I would like to acknowledge them. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a group of 47 constituents that are going to come in from Glen Avon school in St. Paul. With them we will have Mrs. O'Neill, Miss Penno, Mr. Doonanco, and Mr. Levasseur. I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity for that introduction, maybe a belated introduction. I would ask the members of the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Stelmach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature very special visitors from Viking school. They are of course very enthusiastic. The school has a history of tremendous scholastic achievement, and probably just as important given the NHL finals, it's also the home of the very famous Sutter hockey family. You can see where the hard work comes from given the students we are about to introduce today. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Marlene Taylor, Mrs. Muriel Hill, and Mrs. Debbie Snider, a teacher assistant; parent helpers Ms Christine Ruzicka, Mrs. Trish Hollar, Mrs. Jeannette Andraszewski, Mrs. Cindy Severson, and Ms Trish Friend. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly two of our staff members who are seated in the public gallery. Aaron Roth has been a researcher with the Alberta Liberal caucus office since 2002. Prior to joining the caucus, Aaron worked in the Lethbridge-East constituency office for three years. He's a dedicated researcher and has served both the caucus and the Member for Lethbridge-East very well for five years. I regret to say that Aaron will be leaving us at the end of this summer to pursue what I'm sure most would think of as a more noble calling. He will be entering the seminary to pursue a life in the priesthood.

The second staff member I wish to introduce is Steven Rowe. Steven will be working in the Alberta Liberal caucus office for the

summer under the STEP program. He's currently enrolled at the U of A and is working toward his bachelor of arts degree in political science, specializing in Middle Eastern and African studies. Before going to university, Steven spent several years working in the oil field and, before that, a few years working in Israel as a farm labourer.

I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

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

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise today and to introduce two outstanding guests, both from the village of Breton, where I resided for 12 years. The first one I've introduced before. He's the mayor of Breton, also the vice-president of the AUMA, and today he was discussing the rural development initiative. I'll ask Darren Aldous to stand.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, formerly of Breton but who has now moved to this fine city, a very good friend of mine, one of Alberta's great volunteers. In fact, he helped me get elected. Let's give a big round of applause and welcome also to Ben Haluszka.

I'd ask them both to rise and receive the welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure of mine today to rise to introduce Mayor Barb Sjoquist and CAO Terry Tiffen, both from the village of Edgerton within my constituency. Edgerton is a small community, but they think big, and they're a model for rural development in this province. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to stand and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly an excellent Calgarian who has just moved to Edmonton, Stephen Addo. Stephen is now working as registrar of the Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists. Stephen came to Canada from Ghana, West Africa, with an engineering degree and then worked in New Brunswick. He is also a reservist officer in the Canadian armed forces, and he is now settling here in Edmonton. I want him to stand and receive the warm applause from the Assembly.

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

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly three members of the policy development team of my department. They are seated in the members' gallery: Leanne Connell, Darrell Hemery, and Graham Statt. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two good friends of mine, Héctor González, who is one of my constituents and thus my boss and also a former graduate student

of mine, and Leo Campos, a well-respected and well-known community activist. Like thousands of other Canadians of Chilean ancestry they were forced to flee their homeland because of the brutality and oppression of the Pinochet dictatorship. Both of these gentlemen are sitting in the public gallery. I will now request them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly another two well-respected leaders of the Chilean community, Ramon Antipan and Sandra Azocar. Ramon Antipan is representing the Chilean-Canadian Community Association of Edmonton and Sandra Azocar the Chilean Canadian Cultural Society. Like thousands of other Canadians of Chilean ancestry they were forced to flee their homeland because of the brutality and oppression of the Pinochet dictatorship. Ramon and Sandra are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

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

Taxation Policy

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to a tax system that's fair for everyone, Alberta has fallen behind British Columbia and Ontario. Albertans earning \$80,000 or less pay more in personal income taxes than people in B.C., and Albertans earning \$70,000 or less pay more in personal income taxes than people in Ontario. My questions are to the Minister of Revenue. Why does this government charge middle-income earners more in income taxes than our competitors in Ontario and B.C.?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to repeat an answer to the same question asked yesterday actually. With respect to the Alberta government's policy on taxation we have gone for some time, as we know, to a single rate for simplicity's sake to avoid a whole bunch of problems that are actually punitive to those that are in family situations, income between husband and wife. When you look at the levels of who earns what income, there are varying amounts at various ranges between \$20,000 to \$80,000, whether you're single, whether you're two parents, whether you have a family.

In many of the categories Alberta rates are still lower than all the provinces, but in all of the categories our rates wouldn't necessarily be the lowest. What is true and what continues to be true is that our overall tax load on persons remains the lowest in all provinces, throughout the country.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you. To the same minister: how does the minister justify the unfair policy that under Alberta's flat tax a cabinet minister pays the same tax rate as a Wal-Mart employee?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, let's take that example, then, and understand that. First off, we have the highest exemption of taxes at the low rate. Our exemption rate started at \$13,000 and is indexed,

growing every year. Approximately \$15,000 of income that an individual earns is with no taxes paid at all. So if you want to take the person at the low rate, the Wal-Mart worker, they paid nothing, virtually no taxes because \$15,000 of it is exempt.

Dr. Taft: To the same minister: how does the minister justify the unfair policy that health care premiums take a bigger percentage of income from an Albertan earning \$50,000 than from an Albertan earning \$150,000?

Mr. Melchin: Mr. Speaker, with respect, the person that earns the \$150,000 still pays more taxes than the person at \$50,000. They are always paying more taxes in absolute dollars.

When we say unfair and punitive, why is it that there should be an approach to penalize income? Just because you want to destroy the initiative to work overtime, do you want to destroy the initiative to attract people here that want to take the risk and earn money? No, we're not going to penalize those people that want to take the initiative and earn income.

Thank you.

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

Automobile Insurance Reforms

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Finance minister in an astonishing display of mismanagement admitted to the Public Accounts Committee this morning that she fumbled the ball on skyrocketing auto insurance rates when she indicated that she didn't know her department was rubber-stamping rate increases that led to a record high 59 per cent rise in auto insurance premiums for average Albertans. Adding insult to injury, the minister tried to paint herself as a heroine by stating that she had stepped in after the fact with a freeze that effectively locked in those rates until 2005, permanent high prices for auto insurance. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. Why did you stand by and do nothing when Albertans were facing unprecedented auto insurance rate increases?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to clarify something. For a chairman of a Public Accounts Committee to come in here and tell barefaced lies to this House – I did not say that at that committee this morning, and I am very upset with that coming in here to this House, and I'll deal with that later.

Let's get on to the insurance issue, Mr. Speaker. When it was raised in the activity and annual report of the Department of Finance that this was an issue that had to be dealt with, clearly that's exactly what we did. I have to say that when we raised this issue and realized that Albertans were being jeopardized and penalized from abiding by the law in this province by having available affordable and accessible insurance, we took action and we didn't wait.

We put together a team to come forward with recommendations. That was co-chaired by the Member for Medicine Hat, who took copious months and hours to gather information to bring forward to our caucus so that we could make some rational, logical, straightforward decisions that would be to the benefit of Albertans, and we did that last summer. We further put together an implementation team to carry forward the recommendations from our July caucus meeting to put in a new structure for Albertans that would benefit them, and I take great exception to you, sir, indicating anything different than that.

I believe that we are on a path that this summer will bring to Albertans an insurance plan that will serve them well, that will serve

their needs and will be there for them. That's what we're aiming for, and we are on target to deliver just that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Do I take it that the Minister of Finance will be rising later on a point of order or privilege?

Mrs. Nelson: Yes, I will.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why did you stand by and do nothing while the auto insurance industry was racking up record profits totalling \$2.6 billion, some of that on the backs of Alberta consumers?

Mrs. Nelson: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. member has been, but we've been debating this issue for a whole year in this House and before that, and I can tell you that we have not sat back. We have done consultation. We have done work. We've brought two pieces of legislation forward in this House that have been debated in this House and passed in this House to put a structure forward that will give Albertans an insurance program that will work. We are in the process of finalizing those regulations, and they will be up and running this summer.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: when will you show us proof that of the 155 of the 157 applications for rate increases that were rubber-stamped by your department – where is the justification for this, and if not, will you roll rates back to pre March 2002 levels?

Mrs. Nelson: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Finance does not rubber-stamp applications for rate increases. There is an Automobile Insurance Board, that receives applications from the industry. They look at the prudence of those applications. If they feel that they were not correct, they would send them back.

Was it a good enough scrutiny? Probably. At the time it might have been. I don't think it is for the future. That's why under our new regulations we will be regulating insurance premiums, and we will be regulating them in the best interests of Albertans.

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

Public Insurance Model

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Revenue to the province of Alberta from crop and hail insurance premiums is estimated to total \$153 million in this budget year. My first question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. How much is estimated by the government to be paid out to farmers in crop and hail insurance this year?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, I am by tradition a very . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier has the floor.

Mrs. McClellan: I am by tradition, I think, a calm and reasoned person in this House, and I always take the questions that I receive

from hon. members most seriously. But I want to say that if the hon. member believes that I can today describe what the crop conditions of this province are going to be this year, if I had those talents, Mr. Speaker, there probably would be another place for me.

Mr. MacDonald: To the Minister of Finance: given that we have over \$400 million set aside for that program, why is the government involved in crop and hail insurance programs and will not consider public automobile insurance in this province?

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I have a real problem here looking at the rules and understanding how that question fits in. There are two sides to that question; take whichever one you choose, if you wish.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows full well that the crop insurance program, that has over 40 years of successful history in this province, is a tripartite program that has been developed by and shared by the producers, the government of Canada, and the government of Alberta. He should also know – if he were to research this, it's not hard to find this information – that this program is actuarially sound in the entirety of the program. So it is a completely different matter. It is a risk-management tool that has been accepted on a national basis.

Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member should also know that agriculture is a 50-50 shared jurisdiction with the government of Canada, one of the only departments that is, and all of the programs that we develop on a national basis, such as crop insurance, any of the risk-management tools, the agricultural policy framework, are developed in consensus with the 10 provinces, the territories, and the federal government. To compare that to auto insurance, I can't go there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time to the Minister of Finance: given that close to 60 per cent of Albertans indicated via a government poll that they want public auto insurance, why is that not debated at the standing policy committee? Why can't we have public auto insurance in this province?

Mrs. Nelson: Mr. Speaker, when we as a caucus went through the process of evaluation just about a year ago, we made the decision that our policy would be to go with the private sector delivering automobile insurance in the province of Alberta for a number of reasons. One, we saw no direct advantage for a change, and we had a structure here that in fact could very well deliver the product.

Now, as everyone knows, the path to delivering that product has been a difficult one because – let's be very honest – to accomplish our goal of lowering our rates so that they're affordable and accessible, money has had to come out of the system, and that's been on the side of the premiums that have been paid. Clearly, that hasn't always been accepted with warm feelings from the industry. However, they have come to the table and are prepared to continue on, and that would be the preference from going out and creating a government entity to do the same function. So we chose to go with the private sector and have them continue on operating in this province.

Let's be very honest. There are roughly 70 insurance companies in the province, and they have branch offices throughout Alberta with a number of people who are perfectly capable of delivering this service to Albertans as they have in the past but at a reasonably priced cost.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

The Speaker: Hon. members, I feel that I must make a clarification. *Beauchesne* 409, dealing with questions in question period, says that in order for a question to be in order, "It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate."

Now, there's also a tradition we follow here that if an hon. member is recognized, they raise a first question and then they're allowed two supplementals. It has always been understood that supplementals must have something to do with the first question. I'm sorry; I just cannot find the connection between crop insurance and automobile insurance.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Supplementary Prescription Drug Benefit Program

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A young mother fighting cancer recently approached my office. She was turned down for the government supplementary drug benefit plan because she owes \$401 in health care premium arrears even though she's paying back the arrears at the rate of \$50 per month. To withhold health benefits from someone with a life-threatening illness as a collection tactic is deplorable. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: why does this government have a policy of denying access to the supplementary prescription drug program to cancer patients who are in arrears on their health care premiums even when an agreement is in place and is being honoured to pay these arrears?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, it is the policy of this government that individuals are not restricted from accessing the health care system regardless of their ability to pay, first off. I would be concerned about this circumstance as outlined by the hon. member. I don't have any details. He's not provided me with the advantage of any material before me. But if the hon. member would like to provide me with the details, I would certainly be pleased to look into this matter.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will provide the minister with the details.

However, given that this question is about the policy, not just one individual, how can the government justify an uncaring policy that uses eligibility for supplementary health benefits as a coercive tool for collecting past health care premium debts?

Mr. Mar: I've already indicated what the policy of the government is, Mr. Speaker. So, again, I'll look forward to the individual details of this particular case.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, I have the policy here.

Why does the minister consider it acceptable that a cancer patient meeting the terms of an agreement to repay their Alberta health care premiums is denied access to the modest benefits provided by the government's supplementary drug benefit plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mar: Thank you. I believe, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has asked the same question three times.

Health Care Reforms

Mr. Lord: Mr. Speaker, last week we had a town hall forum in my constituency on the future of health care, which overall went very well. Questions were asked as to what areas we might be looking at changing and why there was any need for it. My first question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. I am wondering if high-profile special events, such as last night's Calgary Flames/San Jose hockey game, generally have had any noticeable impact on the number and type of emergency room visits to local emergency rooms.

Mr. Mar: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say right off the top that I can't think of very many emergencies that would have kept me away from the television set last night.

There have been media reports, Mr. Speaker, that there have been a reduced number of calls for fire, for police, and for ambulance services when a Flames game is underway. In fact, there's a media report – and I've been advised of this personally – that the games may in fact result in people reporting their illnesses differently. A man who was undergoing a heart attack was asked a standard question in the triage as to when these symptoms started. He said: between the second and the third periods.

That I'm aware of, Mr. Speaker, the regional health authorities in their emergency rooms do not record the impact that such special events may have on their emergency room visits. They do, however, schedule emergency staff in accordance with what their historical data has been with respect to when they are busy, such as on weekends.

2:00

Mr. Lord: To the same minister: given that the Fraser Institute report indicates that Canada is experiencing a much greater shortage of physicians and specialists per capita than any other OECD country, could the minister explain what Alberta is doing to solve the current doctor shortage?

The Speaker: I gave a little caution here a little earlier to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar about consistency in questions. Once again, I am having a real difficult time finding the connection between emergency room visitations and an OECD report. Do you have another one?

Mr. Lord: My final supplemental question for the same minister along the line of health care reform areas that we might be looking at is: is it the case that there is evidence to indicate that people may be doing or not doing things that might impact their overall health in terms of their lifestyle? What would the minister be proposing to do if that is the case?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, indeed, there are many examples of people who are taking responsibility for their own health in this province – we applaud that – but there are of course many examples where individuals are not.

We are in the business of promoting wellness. We think that this is an underlying theme that must move forward as we try to reform and renew the health care system. We believe in the importance of investing in promotion and prevention. We think that there are frankly many, many areas where people could be doing better. We do have a tobacco reduction strategy. We have a Healthy U campaign that's underway. We've worked in collaboration with other portfolios, such as the hon. Minister of Learning, who has put forward mandatory daily physical education.

Mr. Speaker, regions throughout this province are committed to

wellness programs. We are setting targets such as a 10-year target for diabetes, and we are moving in a strategy to help promote better exercise and better eating habits so that we can actually make those targets happen 10 years from now.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Charlebois Consulting Ltd.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to public accounts tabled yesterday, the Department of Health and Wellness awarded almost \$120,000 in contracts to Charlebois Consulting, a company 100 per cent owned by the minister of health's former executive assistant Kelley Charlebois. In fact, in the two years since Kelley Charlebois left his position with the minister, the Minister of Health and Wellness has awarded a total of over \$250,000 in contracts. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How does the minister explain giving over a quarter of a million dollars in government contracts to a PR firm owned by his former executive assistant?

Mr. Mar: Let me say first of all that that would include the expenses that were incurred in the conduct of this business, but most of all, Mr. Speaker, we get very, very good value and excellent advice from Mr. Charlebois.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister tell us what reports Charlebois Consulting has completed for Health and Wellness, and would he table them, please?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, there are no reports as such.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell us whether Charlebois Consulting won these contracts through a competitive process?

Mr. Mar: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Alcohol Ban in Provincial Parks

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past few years about this time of year I've stood in my place and asked questions of the responsible minister regarding an issue of concern to me and to others in my constituency with respect to a rite-of-passage party, so to speak, in the Cypress Hills and the increasing amount of violence and dangerous conditions that seem to be progressing each year. The minister indicated each time I've asked the question that he is intending to take the situation seriously and will be putting into place a number of reforms. Well, this year the minister certainly has taken the situation seriously and, some would argue, has maybe even overreacted to the situation by announcing that there will be a pilot project instituted in a number of parks that involves an outright ban of alcohol in provincial parks. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. I would like to ask the Community Development minister how it is that he came to choose the three locations for his pilot project that will be running on the long weekend in May?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the hon. member is exactly correct in that preamble with respect to the sudden and very sharp increase we have seen in liquor-related offences in our provincial parks. I want to say that we are prompted by the fact that 240 liquor-related offences occurred on the May long weekend a year or so ago, and over 50 per cent of those were attributable to three provincial campgrounds: Aspen Beach, Miquelon Lake, and Cypress Hills. As a result, we chose to do a pilot in those three provincial parks only to try and ensure that visitors and Albertans alike have a more enjoyable and a safer weekend there. So it's a total temporary liquor ban project on a pilot basis.

Mr. Renner: Can the minister tell us how this ban will be enforced?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, we're undertaking an extensive advertising and promotion campaign, if you will, so that potential visitors will be apprised of what is happening with respect to the liquor ban enforcement in those three provincial campground areas. We'll be putting signage on main roads. We'll be putting signage at the entrances, at the campground facilities, and distributing leaflets and brochures and so on to make sure that it's well understood.

Secondly, the enforcement side will be handled by our parks conservation officers and working in tandem with other enforcement agencies so that we will see, potentially, fines, if necessary, up to \$100, perhaps court appearances. Some people will be asked to leave for that weekend if they violate the law. In a general sense, we're hoping for compliance from visitors who might be thinking of carrying alcohol into those three provincial parks only to please not do that or it will be confiscated or they'll just be turned away.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Given that this is a pilot project, can the minister tell us how the results of this pilot will be evaluated, and does he expect that this kind of liquor ban would be extended to other provincial parks and campgrounds as a result?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we'll be doing the usual things that we do with respect to satisfaction surveys of the individuals who visited those sites over that long weekend in those three locations and seeing whether or not the main objective of creating a more enjoyable and a safer May long weekend did occur. Were there fewer problems? Was there less vandalism? Was there less rowdiness? Were there fewer complaints and so on? Those will be some of the benchmarks.

To the second part of the question the answer is: no, not at this time. We're waiting to evaluate the pilot results, and then we'll go from there, but we have no intention of expanding this temporary liquor ban into other parks whatsoever, unless something really dramatic happens and it were to become necessary to look at that possibility.

Thank you.

Twining of Highway 4

Mr. Bonner: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation has suggested that the plans for the eastern route of highway 4 through Milk River had many problems, but he fails to recognize a third design that was presented to him to keep the route on the east side. To the Minister of Transportation: given that in the design provided

by O'Brien Engineering & Surveys Ltd. created in August of 2000, the survey solves the problems that the minister brought up about the sewage pond and the secondary road crossing, why has the government not considered this design?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned yesterday, this decision was made five years ago. Later today, at a very appropriate time in our schedule, I will be tabling quite detailed responses to the questions raised by the hon. member yesterday that not only will answer this question but others that he may have with respect to this project.

2:10

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that the reeve of the county brought this new design to you expressing the county's support behind it, will this government consider the redesign?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are many, many contributors to a final decision made given the new location of the highway. They, of course, do include input from the municipality but also from numerous engineering consultants that might have been hired either by Alberta Transportation or by another party with interest as to the location of the highway. We look at all the information that comes before us, and we make the best decision possible.

Mr. Bonner: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: why is this government content with spending so much more money on a western route when a more economically viable and environmentally friendly solution for the eastern route has been found?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is making his own opinion on what is cheaper and what is not cheaper. In five years a lot has happened in that particular area, and I would ask him to wait for the answers that I will table. He can review them, and then he can bring anything else forward that he may like with respect to that project.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Wheat and Barley Marketing

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that Bill 206, introduced in the Legislature by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, may be held over until the fall sitting of the Alberta Legislature. Many Alberta farmers were hopeful that passage of Bill 206 would pressure the Canadian Wheat Board and the federal government to work with the province in setting up a test open market for Alberta over the summer. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can the minister tell us what the plans are and what she will be doing in the interim of the summer, between the sessions, on Bill 206?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly, Bill 206 is one approach to the attempt to offer marketing choice to the producers in our province.

We will continue with our Choice Matters campaign. That has been circulated and, I must say, very well received and I think well received because it's factual. I have invited people who take exception to the campaign to identify to me any errors or weaknesses in this document. Difficult for them to do because it is a document submitted from the Ontario Wheat Marketing Board and others, and

it's difficult for people to find fault. So we'll continue to do that.

I'm going to continue to negotiate with Minister Speller and Minister Alcock, because I truly believe that when they fully understand what the farmers of this province are asking for, they will be hard-pressed to deny it to them on the basis of fairness and equality and choice. This is a democracy. These people own their product. They did not have the opportunity to vote to come into this board, as other marketing boards have. It is my anticipation that those ministers will see that and, clearly, provide the legislative changes that are necessary.

I am also hopeful that the members of the Canadian Wheat Board will recognize the value of their own corporation and understand that they could operate in a world of choice and of a competitive nature.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the minister's response, am I to take it that the Canadian Wheat Board has not responded to our efforts for marketing choice?

Mrs. McClellan: They have responded in a number of ways. One, they've taken exception to our campaign, called it undemocratic. I actually call the opportunity to market your own product democratic, but that's something, I guess, we disagree on.

Mr. Speaker, we had hoped that they would consider it a proposal. We had hoped that they would look at it in that way and that if there were need for improvement in this test market proposal, they would offer those to us, that if they saw ways that it could be strengthened or improved or how it could work, they would come back to us. In fact, what they have done is opt to give not one ounce of consideration even though 83 per cent of the producers in our province have asked for choice. As I understand it, they continue to tell anyone in our government that they will not consider any proposal that they see as a threat to their existence.

Mr. Horner: A final supplemental, Mr. Speaker. The minister mentioned the Choice Matters campaign in her answers to me. I'm wondering if she has heard from Alberta producers that would indicate to her that support is lessening or growing for our choice campaign.

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, the indications we have from producers are that they like the information. It's factual; it's straightforward; it's easily understood.

I recently met with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, of which many producers in this province are members. That organization in fact found that 91 per cent of its members supported choice. So we're not going to give up. It's obviously what the producers in this province want. This government has a responsibility to represent their views, not those of a monopoly.

I will end with this one more time: this is not a threat to the Canadian Wheat Board. This government has never advocated the end of the Wheat Board, and if the Wheat Board is as good as they say they are – and they have told me that on repeated occasions – they are under no threat from offering marketing choice to the producers in this province.

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

Water Storage

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of

Environment said that we needed to build more water storage. My questions today are to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister clarify what methods of water storage he is considering?

Thank you.

Dr. Taylor: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was talking and looking out into the future for Alberta. My point was that as we move into the future, we need to have a sustainable supply of water for Alberta: for Albertans in their homes, for Alberta industry, for Alberta agriculture, and for the aquatic habitats. Let me start by saying that we're looking at the future.

The way the Alberta supply comes is in the spring. We get the runoff, and it comes, and we pass on, depending on the river basin, anywhere from 70 to 85 per cent into Saskatchewan. What we need to do and what I very clearly said yesterday is to look at ways we can capture more of that water. We haven't done that yet, but I hope that in the future as a government we will actually look at ways that we can capture more of that water.

Ms Blakeman: The quote was actually, "Conserving water means building storage."

Given that evaporation would make water storage useless in curbing the shortages that are taking place, why is the minister considering this kind of thing?

Dr. Taylor: Well, obviously, Mr. Speaker, the people that write her questions have no idea about water storage.

Let me give you the example of the Oldman dam. It doesn't all evaporate. There's lots of water in the Oldman dam, and it controls the water that flows through Medicine Hat and Lethbridge. I can tell you that in 2001 if it wasn't for the Oldman dam, Medicine Hat probably would not have had water. There was enough storage in the Oldman dam that we could keep the water flowing through the Medicine Hat area. Certainly, there's an evaporation issue, but we can store lots of water, and it's a minimal problem.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that groundwater reservoirs are by far the better way to store water, why is the minister not considering long-term solutions such as moving flood dykes away from flood plains so that wetlands can be restored, thus feeding groundwater sources?

Dr. Taylor: I'd better be a bit careful here, Mr. Speaker. We need to look at all sources of storage – and that's the point I was making – as we move forward. We do not have a plan to store more water, but we need to develop a plan. We need to look into the future, determine the needs of Albertans, and then figure out how we're going to store more of that water that passes on to Saskatchewan to meet the future needs of this growing province.

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

2:20 International Air Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Economic Development bragged in a news release that the government had snagged another direct international flight for the Calgary airport. However, the minister neglected to mention the fact that his government and the Edmonton Tory caucus have said to Edmontonians who are frustrated by the lack of international flights

out of Edmonton: hasta la vista, baby. While the government ministers are ferried about in the government's own private Air Farce, severely normal Edmontonians have only 12 international flights per day as compared to 39 for Calgary. My questions are to the Minister of Economic Development. Why is it that an Edmonton-based minister is not making it a priority to increase service from the Edmonton International Airport, instead choosing to follow the long-standing Tory policy of ignoring Edmonton?

Mr. Norris: Oh, where to begin, Mr. Speaker? I just don't know. First of all, I would like to say, with all due respect to the hon. member opposite, that I'm a minister of the Crown in the province of Alberta. I am not a minister for the city of Edmonton in any way, shape, or form. We are very well represented in Edmonton after the last election with the hon. members surrounding me, but the judgments that I make as a Minister of Economic Development are for the province of Alberta.

Clearly, the City Centre Airport, which the hon. member alluded to, is a vital piece of development for not only Edmonton, for which we should be very grateful to northern Alberta, but for all the north, where we book about \$50 billion or \$60 billion worth of projects right now. Access into Edmonton is clearly one of the big concerns and one of big reasons they choose to come to Edmonton. So on that particular issue I believe that the hon. member should be very clear that our job as a government is to help promote economic development in any region of the province. It doesn't matter if it's Calgary or Edmonton or rural Alberta. It just matters that it makes good economic sense. In this case it does.

I think I'd like to correct the hon. member and say, respectfully, that I was not quoted as saying that we got another flight for Calgary, nor did we. We are very, very pleased that the tour operator out of Britain decided to extend their season. It used to end in October, Mr. Speaker. They've now decided to go year-round. That was the work of – get this – one of our missions that we took where we may have bought some orange juice, but we also secured new flights into Calgary, and this is a direct result of it.

I'll conclude by saying that the bottom line about any new charters, whether they come into Calgary or Edmonton, is beneficial for all of Alberta because then Travel Alberta kicks into gear to spread the word and get to see the whole province of Alberta. So we're very happy. It's a great, positive situation, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Why is it that this minister's priority has been to secure access to Edmonton's municipal airport for the government air fleet while ignoring the needs of regular Edmontonians who need international air service?

Mr. Norris: I almost think that the hon. member is getting his questions from our own members. So I'll say thank you for that question.

I'm not trying to secure anything, nor have I ever tried to secure anything. The Edmonton Regional Airports Authority, which runs both the International Airport in Leduc and the City Centre Airport, has always recommended that scheduled flights to a limited degree will stay. But charter flights were never in question. Private operators, of which the government of Alberta is one, were never in question, nor was medevac ever in question. So I think it would behoove the hon. member to do some research. I was never suggesting to keep that airport open for the Alberta government, Mr. Speaker. I was asking to keep it open for the flights that come from

the north with their bags of money and their contracts and their engineering works.

Mr. Mason: I'm not sure the mayor would agree with the minister, Mr. Speaker.

Why did the government promise Edmontonians a seat at the table if they voted Conservative only to prove that 11 Tory MLAs equals zilch when it comes to Edmonton?

The Speaker: That has nothing to do with the first two.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Union Organizing Practices

Mr. McClelland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. The issue of salting, whereby a union certification vote takes place in part because of the instigation of union members in a nonunion workplace with no long-term attachment to the employer, is of concern to many nonunion Alberta employers. Recently at an Alberta Building Trades Council function I learned from union leaders that, in fairness, a continuing attachment to an employer should be a condition of continuing or of certification. Will the minister consider continuing attachment to an employer to be a precondition of union certification?

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying: go, Flames, go. Everybody is wearing these nice little decals, but we're not hearing it on the floor of the House, so now it's in the record for today.

In terms of the question I think that the suggestion made to him at the trades council function, as I understand it, seems to be very fair and the sort of thing that should be considered in normal practice.

What I want to say to the hon. member is that salting exists today and that it is the responsibility of my department now to deal directly with the salting. We, of course, plan to do that. Now, if that takes care of the other suggestion that has been made – and I believe that it will – then of course we've resolved the issue.

Many of us have been around here a long time. The salting is not a new issue. This has come up before, and I guess the intent this time is to put salting to bed by defining it clearly and making it an unfair labour practice.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Alberta SuperNet

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Is Axia using computers owned by the Alberta government to run the SuperNet?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how to answer that question. I'm presuming that Axia supplies their own equipment and operates the network using their own equipment, which may have been part of the contract to get the network established. But, again, on that specific question, I'd be happy to do more work on that and provide her an answer tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Then further to that, if the minister can also find out what department oversight is in place for Axia to ensure

that billing and usage of government-owned equipment is coming forth according to the contract that has been signed.

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, Axia SuperNet Ltd. does operate under a licence agreement from the government of Alberta and manages a network, and it does come under the purview of Innovation and Science.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that companies do go under, what business continuity plans are in place if Axia cannot or will not fulfill the terms of their contract?

Mr. Doerksen: Mr. Speaker, that question is pure speculation. We have built-in provisions in the contract that contemplate any action with respect to – for instance, on the infrastructure build that we have with Bell West, to ensure that that infrastructure build gets completed, we have a \$100 million bond to ensure that completion. Similar kinds of instruments have been provided throughout the entire contract, whether it be on the access management or whether it be on the infrastructure build.

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

Tourism Opportunities

Mr. Hutton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been approached by a number of groups as we are celebrating our hundredth anniversary. We are hosting the Churchill Cup in Edmonton and the Canadian championships in Edmonton, and I believe we are also hosting the world triathlon championships in the province this summer. My questions are to the Minister of Economic Development, responsible for tourism. What efforts is his department making to promote these very important and special events?

2:30

Mr. Norris: Well, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question, and I'll maybe ask the hon. Minister of Community Development to supplement. What the department does, Mr. Speaker, quite simply is try to identify opportunities throughout the province in the summer and the winter for people to come and visit the province and expand their tourism opportunities.

To that end, we have worked very diligently with a number of the opportunities, most specifically the Churchill Cup, Mr. Speaker, which is a world rugby sanctioned function coming up in Calgary and Edmonton, and I would encourage all members to get more information. It'll be great for their communities. The world triathlon is indeed happening in Edmonton in July, and the World Masters Games are coming.

What we do in conjunction with Travel Alberta is work with those groups to partner and promote those events throughout the province, and you'll find them on the centennial web site. You'll also find them on the Travel Alberta web site. They're great opportunities when people choose to visit Alberta for other activities.

The Speaker: The hon. member?

head:

Recognitions

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of several members to participate.

Calgary Flames Team Canada Calgary Roughnecks

Mr. Lord: Mr. Speaker, how about those Flames? And how about Team Canada while we're at it?

Mr. Speaker, the temperature is rising, and our entire country is going hockey nuts right now as that red-hot Flames fever spreads right across the nation. It's no longer just the Calgary Flames any more, no longer the Alberta Flames; it's the Canadian Flames. And with last night's decisive butt-kicking of the San Jose Sharks, we're all holding our breath now just waiting for that Stanley Cup victory, which we all know is so very close now.

Mr. Speaker, it is amazing to see the incredible competition in hockey games we've seen over the past few weeks. It's not just the Flames that have been doing the butt-kicking either. We have the gold medal performance by Team Canada at the World Hockey Championships in Prague as well, the second victory in just two years.

And, hey, how about those Calgary Roughnecks while we're at it? With their North American NLL championship last Friday at the Saddledome in our official national game of lacrosse clearly Calgarians, Albertans, and Canadians are definitely back at the top of the world, on top of our games again, both official and unofficial, and may I say "finally."

So where is Stompin' Tom Connors? We need him to rework his song from "the good old hockey game" to "the great new hockey games."

Go, Flames, go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Tim Cooper

Mr. Horner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I take great pleasure in rising today to recognize the extraordinary efforts and achievements of a young man from my constituency. Tim Cooper is a 17-year-old double-A hockey player who attends St. Albert high school.

Not only does Tim participate in athletics; he also excels in his academic endeavours, as well. Tim is one of only seven students to be awarded the prestigious University of Alberta president's citation. To be considered for this scholarship, a student must have attained an average above 95 per cent for all three grades of high school. This young man has met this mark and exceeded it, maintaining an average of no less than 98 per cent throughout high school. He has also been awarded the Alexander Rutherford scholarships for grades 10, 11, and 12. In addition to this, Tim has been appointed as the valedictorian of his graduating class.

He plans to study the sciences at the U of A, and I am certain, Mr. Speaker, that we will be hearing more about this gifted student in the future.

Thank you.

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

Warner Hockey School

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and recognize an innovative and forward-thinking initiative which was established in my constituency: the Warner girls hockey school. This institute offers a year-round hockey program which is aimed at

attracting young women from all over Canada, Alberta, and abroad.

Mr. Speaker, school enrolments were beginning to decline in Warner to a low level which threatened the existence of the school. To ensure its survival, the town of Warner developed a unique plan to revitalize both the community and the school and established the Warner hockey school.

This endeavour was truly a collective accomplishment by the people of Warner. It took the community over 10,000 hours of volunteer time and over \$340,000 in funds raised. However, the school and the collaborative efforts have proven successful. This initiative is a testament to what can happen when a community works together for a common goal. But more than that, this project illustrates the perseverance, drive, and forward thinking of Albertans which has proven to make our province so successful.

I ask all members of the Assembly to join with me in commending the Warner hockey school and the town of Warner for their innovation and visionary approach to establishing a now thriving hockey program in order to save their school and an important part of their community.

Thank you.

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

Sandra Woitas

Mr. Masyk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to rise and recognize a truly great Albertan. Ms Sandra Woitas is a lady who has spent a great deal of her life bettering the lives of our children. With a master's degree in education policy from the University of Alberta, she has spent her career as an educator.

Sandra has been a teacher at some of Edmonton's poorest schools and is a former principal at Edmonton's Norwood school, where presently my son, Brett, attends. She also spent six years at the central office of the Edmonton public school board as a consultant. She possesses a deep knowledge of Edmonton's social and economic challenges and a commitment to the downtown. She has also built a strong working relationship with the city's business community and with all levels of government in her efforts to better the lives of inner-city children.

In 2001 Sandra faced the challenge of leading the city centre education project, which led to the consolidation of Delton, Eastwood, John A. McDougall, McCauley, Norwood, Parkdale, and Spruce Avenue schools into one education community that resulted in an enriched, first-class education for almost 2,000 disadvantaged children, an extraordinary challenge that Sandra made happen with dedication and a special talent.

Sandra has established Partners for Kids, is the past president of Big Brothers Big Sisters, is an honorary member of the Riverview Rotary Club, and she also is a member of the Edmonton Police Commission. It's easy to see why Sandra is well known across Alberta as a speaker on a variety of educational topics.

And just last week, Mr. Speaker, Ms Sandra Woitas was included in the *Edmonton Journal's* top 100 Edmontonians of the century, truly a special honour for this special Albertan.

Thank you very much.

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

Asian Heritage Month

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons Alberta continues to be such a great place to live, work, and raise a family is Albertans' respect for cultural diversity established so many years ago. Each of us is part of our diverse, vibrant, and enthusiastic

landscape of communities that share a strong commitment to the quality of life we all enjoy.

May is the month to recognize and celebrate the many ways in which Canadians of Asian heritage contribute to the cultural richness and prosperity of the province of Alberta. As Albertans celebrate the heritage of Asian culture, the old will remember, the young will discover the importance of Asian-Canadian contributions to Alberta and Canada.

I wish to thank each and every member of the organizing committee for the Asian Heritage Month's events in Calgary. Myself, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, and the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Creek had the honour to be on the advisory board.

Through co-operation and community spirit we can all do it together.

Best wishes for the month of celebration.

Chilean Community

Mr. MacDonald: It is my pleasure to rise today to recognize Chilean Canadians who overcame hardship and oppression to come to Canada and build a better life for themselves and their families. Many members of Alberta's Chilean community proved their commitment to democracy Monday by exercising their right to peaceful protest outside this Legislature.

Fortunately, all Canadians have the right to express opposition to the government without the danger of reprisal. Many Chileans came to Alberta to escape torture, oppression, and even death for having political views contrary to those of a brutal dictator. Sadly, many Albertans don't recognize how fortunate we are to live in a country where our rights are respected and protected.

The Chilean Canadians who responded to the inflammatory remarks with a protest reminded many Canadians how lucky we are to have never experienced such atrocities. I'm proud of the protesters for speaking out, and I'm proud that they now call Alberta, Canada, home.

Thank you.

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

2:40

Martha and Henry

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to recognize two Albertans whose feelings of betrayal by a series of promises broken by this government are making them seriously reconsider their political allegiance. Martha and Henry were told in 2001 that deregulating our electricity industry would give them demonstrably lower bills. Instead they got rate riders and bills that were as much as double what they were paying under a regulated system.

Then they were promised compensation for the BSE crisis. Instead, they saw their hard-earned tax dollars being funnelled into the pockets of American packing houses.

Martha and Henry were promised smaller class sizes, but their children remain packed into overcrowded schoolrooms. Martha and Henry were promised lower auto insurance, yet their rates remain 35 per cent higher than what their cousins in Saskatchewan and British Columbia are paying.

Martha and Henry can be forgiven if they are wondering what went wrong. Mr. Speaker, it's time the Premier and the government stop taking Martha and Henry for granted.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

Mr. Stelmach: I have two tablings, and they are in response to

questions raised yesterday by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today. It's a great pleasure for me to table letters from 18 students from my constituency. Under the guidance of their teacher, Mr. Fekete, these students from Rundle school are becoming active citizens and taking part in the democratic process. Their goal is to have mandatory seat belts installed on school buses. It's my privilege to table letters these students have written asking for mandatory seat belts so that their views may become part of the public record.

I have a couple of other tablings. The first includes two petitions signed by 90 Canadians of Chilean ancestry asking the Premier to apologize to the Chilean community for his remarks on the Pinochet military dictatorship.

The second is a letter from Adolfo Silva of Milton, Ontario, dated May 11, 2004, addressed to the Premier regarding his recent remarks on the Pinochet military dictatorship. He's deeply concerned with the Premier's philosophical thinking and its serious ramifications threatening the civil and democratic rights of the people.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a notice of power bills increasing up to 20 per cent from May 11, 2004, in the *Daily Express* in England as there's work needed to improve their national electricity grid.

The second tabling I have is a notice for a public forum that's to occur Wednesday, May 19, 2004, at Kilkenny Hall. The special guest will be Ken Gosling, a member of B.C.'s Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

Thank you.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Mar, Minister of Health and Wellness, pursuant to the Nursing Profession Act, Alberta Association of Registered Nurses annual report 2002-2003 and the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2003; on behalf of the hon. member Mr. Griffiths, hon. Member for Wainwright, e-mail petition signed by 204 Albertans opposing the exclusion of financial support for infertility treatments under the Canada Health Act.

The Speaker: On a point of clarification the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. Make it brief because I'm going to make a comment on this.

Point of Order
Clarification of Acting Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to get clarification of a ruling made yesterday by the Acting Speaker during debate on second reading of the Appropriation Act. When I rose to ask a question under the clause allowing the five-minute period, 29(2), I was denied the right to do so despite the fact that you provided an opportunity to other members to pose questions to me after I'd completed my

remarks on the amendment. This was the reasoned amendment to the Appropriation Act. So I would like clarification on the rules of that for all members.

The Speaker: Yes. I'd be happy to provide that.

A great deal of energy and activity was spent by the table officers yesterday looking at the historical basis for reasoned amendments and the like, and I think that many of them perhaps had their minds fixed on that rather than what then did happen in the House.

It's absolutely correct that during the debate that occurred yesterday afternoon on the amendment when I was in the chair, I invited members to participate in the five-minute exchange period that's provided for under Standing Order 29(2), and that was done by me. Then later in the afternoon, when I was not in the chair, a similar situation came up, and it's my understanding that the Deputy Chair of Committees basically did not afford that opportunity to the hon. members. The Deputy Chair of Committees has discussed this matter with me, and it should be very, very clear to all members that that provision is available even during debate on amendments in second reading. So it should have been made available yesterday.

That's just a clarification, I think, that is important, and it's clear in all intents that there's absolutely nothing in Standing Order 29 that would suggest that that would not be available.

Speaker's Ruling
Member's Apology

The Speaker: Now, hon. members, the other day I did something in the House when we had a question of a point of order and notice had already been provided to the House and to the chair that the hon. Minister of Finance wanted to rise on either a point of order or a point of privilege. What I did the other day was that when a particular member did it, I looked at the individual I knew that it was going to come to and I afforded that person an opportunity to, quote, do the right thing. That may be a bit abnormal.

I received some notification that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would rise now and offer some . . . [interjection] Just a second. In the parliamentary tradition, depending on what will transpire here, there's a way of us dealing with these matters in the tradition of our thing. I don't know what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is going to say. It would not mean that the Minister of Finance would not have an opportunity to say something, but I'm going to provide the hon. member . . . I did it the other day, and in fairness I'm going to do it again today for the decorum in the House. I'm going to afford this opportunity to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I don't know what the hon. member is going to say. It doesn't mean that – the hon. Minister of Finance will still have a chance.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to withdraw my remarks from earlier today in question period and apologize to the Minister of Finance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is a tradition we have that once an apology is provided and if the feeling is that it's a sincere apology, it would be accepted. It doesn't have to be, so we can continue this.

So I now offer the floor to the hon. Minister of Finance.

Point of Order
Inflammatory Language

Mrs. Nelson: Well, Mr. Speaker, while an attempt to get out of this

has been made, I find, quite frankly, that when the chairman of a select committee of this Legislature stands up and makes a comment to a minister of the Crown who has appeared before that committee in public, in *Hansard*, and indicates that I have said one thing or another at a meeting that only took place this morning and reports that wrongly in this Legislature, the damage is irreparable. I find it unconscionable that a chairman would in fact do that in this Legislature.

I would refer to our Standing Orders 15, 22, and 23. There is an honour, when you talk about honour, Mr. Speaker, in that when you are made the chairman of a select committee of this Legislature, you are given the responsibility and the privilege to head up that committee, not only to report the actions and findings of that committee within this Assembly but an obligation to report them accurately and honestly not only to this Assembly but to the people of Alberta.

2:50

Now, as the cameras were rolling and the accusation was made in the preamble to that question, I was most insulted. I have not received the Blues from question period today. I have looked at the Blues from this morning from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I believe that there were some serious accusations made against me or attributed to comments from my deliberations this morning in that committee, and I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that I have the option to come down with a case of privilege on this member tomorrow after I have the chance to review those Blues from question period today because I feel that my integrity, my honesty, and my openness have been put in question.

I'll tell you one thing further, Mr. Speaker. At 5 minutes to 1 today, before coming to question period, I realized that I had given an incorrect answer to a question at Public Accounts this morning. I phoned this chairman and said that I want to set the record straight, that my controller had indicated that the blue book that I had filed with the Clerk yesterday was for records of \$25,000 and above; I had said \$5,000, and he corrected me. It really was \$5,000, and I didn't want him to have that incorrect information even before we came into the House. So I was being open and up front with him, and then he came around with this other game. I find that dishonest, and I pride myself that if I make a mistake, I'll stand up and say that I've made a mistake. But that kind of representation I find unconscionable.

So I'd ask your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, to allow me the latitude to come back after I review the Blues of both question period and Public Accounts to have a prima facie case of privilege.

The Speaker: Such a request is in order.

head: **Orders of the Day**
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading
Bill 31
Highways Development and Protection Act

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to move Bill 31 in third reading.

Just momentarily I kind of had my head buried in the *Hansard* looking at some of the questions that were raised by members of the opposition, and I'd like to reiterate a number of items. One, the bill allows for taking over the jurisdiction of the 15,000 kilometres of secondary highway, which we did a number of years ago, and including that in the provincial highway network system. They will no longer be called secondary highways. They will just be provin-

cial highways, and they will be planned, designed, and co-ordinated in the same way as any other highways in the province of Alberta.

Now, while taking over the jurisdiction of secondaries and while they were in the jurisdiction of municipalities, Mr. Speaker, a municipality had the right to close the road for some community event, like a parade, but when we assumed full jurisdiction of the secondaries, of course, legally we couldn't really do that. So this bill gives us permission to close a road temporarily for other than an emergency event, and as you know, parades are quite important in rural Alberta, and of course there are certain standards and rules we must follow in closing the road briefly for a parade.

With respect to access roads, many years ago the province of Alberta did pave a number of access roads into smaller communities, which gave these small communities paved access from the municipality to the main highway. We have indicated that we will maintain those access roads, but in some cases we have to be careful with the kind of development that occurs and also be very cognizant of the kind of maintenance that occurs on those access roads, again.

There were a number of questions with respect to the ring roads in Edmonton and Calgary. The province always had jurisdiction over those particular roads. In fact, the land was acquired back during the previous administration, under Premier Lougheed. That was a very visionary move on their part, and now we're following up by finally building the roads in those particular areas.

I believe we've covered pretty well everything other than that there was a question raised with respect to removal of some developments along a highway that may lead to the distraction of the driver. This was raised by the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. What this does is allows us to serve notice to those individuals that might have parked, for instance, a truck with a sign on it in the highway right-of-way or perhaps parked it in an intersection, where it's not only distracting the driver but also impedes the vision for the drivers. We have consulted, of course, with all municipalities, AUMA, AAMD and C, the Urban Development Institute, engineering firms, all groups that may have interest in roads and public roadways in the province.

I believe I've answered most of the questions. The bill does consolidate the two acts, and it will clarify a lot of the differences, let's say, between the Municipal Government Act and the old Public Highways Development Act and City Transportation Act.

I look forward to this bill being approved in the Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I appreciate the answers that were furnished to my questions yesterday through the Minister of Children's Services. She later checked with the Minister of Transportation and brought me additional information, and I appreciate that.

It appears that the government has done due diligence here. They're completing a number of things that they had set out previously. They did a good job of briefing my colleague, the transportation critic, and they appear also to have done a good stakeholder feedback loop.

So at this point I'm happy to support third reading of Bill 31, the Highways Development and Protection Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a third time]

Bill 33
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2004

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move Bill 33, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2004, for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a third time]

**Bill 34
Income Trusts Liability Act**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Revenue on behalf of.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View I'd like to move third reading of Bill 34, Income Trusts Liability Act.

This act, as was probably mentioned in previous stages, is to clarify that those unit holders of income trusts are actually protected by limited liability. Their structures are actually established that way, but it's to help ensure that there's no doubt in debate of law as to that point. It's not to attempt to address other aspects of income trust taxation or anything else. It's just to help clarify the liability.

There will be some further consultation to continue this summer with respect to other income trust governance kinds of questions that might relate to the securities legislation, and we'll be following that up after consultation and be happy to report back to this House later, but I'd like to move third reading of Bill 34.

3:00

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to comment in third reading of Bill 34, the Income Trusts Liability Act. I know that a number of my colleagues have spoken in other readings of this. In particular I think we were looking for answers to the questions that had been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. I'm also noting in *Hansard* that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar put a number of questions on the record. I hear the minister speaking on behalf of the sponsoring member, saying that there will be additional consultation, but I was hoping for the record to get some of those questions answered.

This is an interesting one. I've read what the government has put out; I've read a number of the articles that are dealing with it. Everybody seems cheerful and happy.

Mr. Mason: But not Laurie?

Ms Blakeman: Not me. No. I have concerns here about what the government is doing around management of revenue. Considering how lucky we've been to be located on enormous gas and oil reserves, my feeling on this is that we should have a lot more money than we do, so I continue to question some of the financial decisions that the government makes around tax policy for instance.

A number of times I've questioned the Minister of Revenue on forgone revenue. What are the performance measurements for a number of these schemes where we're giving people tax credits or whatever and we're not bringing in money that we expected to be bringing in?

What's bothering me about this is that it's about a reduction in the corporate income tax that's paid. Now, it's good for attracting investment dollars. There's been some discussion and argument about whether the money stays in Alberta or leaves Alberta. I'm more concerned about a reduction in the corporate tax level just given that we have a cyclical economy that is through moves like this one increasingly reliant on a high dollar-per-barrel amount of

money, and if that tanks, we're at a point where we've now reduced and continue to look at schemes that reduce corporate income tax, for example, to a level that's not sustainable. If that dollar per barrel goes down to I don't know what – any level that it's gone down to in the past: \$13 a barrel, \$10 a barrel, \$8 a barrel – we're sitting here with not very much that's flowing in through other income tax schemes that the government has in place.

Of course, you know, if you're going to have that kind of downturn in the economy – and we do here in Alberta; it's no use pretending we don't – companies go under, so there are even fewer that are paying this kind of income tax. So I always question these schemes, and I want to see the documentation that shows that in the long run this is a great idea and, frankly, that it's sustainable. Increasingly I'm questioning the government on the choices they make about managing our wealth.

So this one just doesn't sit as well with me as it does with some of my colleagues. That's why I enjoy being with the colleagues I'm with, because we can agree to disagree on things like this. I note that my other colleagues have been more supportive of it. I also note that we did put questions on the record to which we were expecting answers before we were going to be in a position of having to vote for or against the bill. It is my understanding that those answers have not been put on the record, and I've put my brief concerns on the record as well. I remain unconvinced that this is the great idea that everyone else seems to think it is.

Thank you for the opportunity.

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

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make a few brief remarks with respect to this bill. As Minister of Justice I meet from time to time with members of the legal community, mainly in Edmonton and Calgary. If I'm in Calgary, I'll arrange to go to a law firm and sit down with lawyers and talk to them about what they find to be impediments to growth or impediments to success in the province in terms of building our economic base and those sorts of things. In almost every one of those meetings I can tell you that one of the things that I've been advised of is the need for upgrading some of our business law in this province.

They've mentioned unlimited liability companies, they've mentioned limited liability partnerships, but most of all they've mentioned income trusts and the need for us to be as current as other jurisdictions and ahead of other jurisdictions with respect to income trusts, the question of limited liability for income trusts where most people believe it actually exists, but there's not a degree of certainty necessary for investors to be comfortable. That has been an issue that's been raised with me over and over again.

So I rise today in the House to say that I'm really pleased that this bill was brought forward in the spring session, that the Minister of Revenue and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View brought this bill to the floor of the House because it satisfies one of those areas that over and over again people who have worked with businesses in this province and who have worked on making sure that business works have made comments on.

Now, I also wanted to rise because the Member for Edmonton-Centre indicated, I think for the first time that I've heard her in the House, an acknowledgment that revenues are cyclical and that sometimes prices go up and sometimes prices go down and that we have in the past seen oil prices around \$10 a barrel. In fact, she even said \$8 a barrel. I think that's an important comment to note and that there is understanding on that side of the House of sustainability and the prudent course of action that this government has taken with respect to revenues and expenditures to maintain sustainability and

to ensure that we don't build program spending to a level that we can't afford.

That's the first I've seen of any understanding of that concept. I may be overblowing the point. Maybe it's not understood as well as I heard it expressed, but for the record I just wanted to congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for acknowledging the severe volatility of oil and gas revenues and natural resource revenues that we have in this province that we have to address from time to time and to ensure for Albertans that we have a prudent expenditure pattern and that we don't overextend ourselves on program spending. I wanted to thank her for acknowledging that on the record.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Is this what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands is participating under?

Mr. Mason: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Mason: I'd like to ask the hon. Attorney General and Government House Leader whether or not, given his concern for the cyclical nature of resource revenue in the province, he thinks that it's prudent for the government to be cutting corporate income tax in half.

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how that pertains to the bill that we're debating, but I'd be happy to answer the question. I think it's the aggressive approach that this government has taken to making Alberta a good place to do business that has provided economic opportunity and good income levels for most Albertans, and we're working on that for all Albertans. One of the ways to do that is to make sure that this is a great place to do business.

One of the ways to make sure that it's a great place to do business is to ensure that taxation levels are fair and reasonable, and I think the policies that have been undertaken with respect to reducing taxes and corporate taxes can demonstrably be shown to have improved the economic climate of the province and therefore improved the economic status of Alberta citizens. We know that when your economic status is good, there's a high correlation to your health care and to all those other things that make quality of life important.

The Speaker: Other questions, comments? Next speaker?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Speaker: Question having been called, does the hon. Minister of Revenue want to conclude the debate?

3:10

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to clarify two points actually, one with respect to investors. This is about investor protection more than it is even just about the income trust organizations and entities. Investors are purchasing these represented, and certainly by structure, that they have limited liability protection.

There is a structure in existence with these income trusts where they lend the money to corporate entities who buy the assets, and therefore limited liability is held inside that corporate entity. But because it's not clear potentially in a debate of law, this is just to express the state and clarify what is actually the structure of income trusts. It's not a creation of a new structure. It's not even a creation of a new entity. Income trusts exist. It's not a creation of a new vehicle. They exist. It's to help clarify our business laws and reflect what is actually represented and purchased by the investors so that

they know with more certainty what it is that they're buying and are not subject to potentially even a minute fraction of risk that they are liable because the structure doesn't have the risk flowing back to them on limited liability.

Consultation: that is the key question, and that's why we're seeking the passage of the bill at this time. There are broader questions with respect to governance with the Securities Act that we are reviewing, not just with income trusts but more broadly. Those are the ones that are not specifically related that we will be consulting on over the summer months.

As such, we'd like to close debate for third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 34 read a third time]

Bill 35

Companies Amendment Act, 2004

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General on behalf of.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora I'd like to move Bill 35, the Companies Amendment Act, 2004, for third reading.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very simple and straightforward act. It amends the Companies Act with respect to allowing the Lieutenant Governor in Council discretion to exempt a company that's incorporated under that act from the residency requirements for directors.

Now, I think the purpose of the act had been explained to the House earlier. There is a company which is resident in Edmonton which is a not-for-profit corporation, which of course are the only companies which are now alive under the Companies Act. Members will know that the Business Corporations Act was passed subsequent to the Companies Act, so all for-profit companies, all other companies are incorporated or continued under the Business Corporations Act. So the only companies that are under the Companies Act are part 9 companies, or not-for-profit companies. We have about 2,000 not-for-profit companies registered under part 9 in Alberta.

We have the situation where we have a part 9 company – CIRG has been referred to in the House earlier – which has come out of the research and the work at the Alberta Cancer Board and which engages primarily in breast cancer research, as I understand it, but has experts from all over the world who are a part of this company which is headquartered in Edmonton and registered in Alberta under part 9 of our Companies Act. But they have international expertise, international directors and offices, as I understand it, in California and Paris, France.

Our Companies Act requires that 50 per cent of the directors of a company be resident Albertans. I believe that the Business Corporations Act has been changed to have 50 per cent Canadians, but the old Companies Act, because it still just applies to part 9 companies, probably wasn't amended, so the residency requirement is 50 per cent Albertans.

If this particular company was to be made to adhere to those rules, they would have two choices. They could either ask their international directors, the pre-eminent research scientists from around the world, to leave their board and lose that talent on their board, or they could take the company out of Alberta and reregister it in some other jurisdiction, presumably California or Paris. Neither of those are good options.

This is a very good case for Edmonton and Alberta to maintain a company that makes a great contribution, to bring that talent into this centre and keep it in this centre to do good things for Edmonton and for Alberta, and the residency requirement does not make a signifi-

cant difference if it makes any difference at all with respect to this company. So it is certainly a good situation to provide an exemption from the residency requirements.

Now, we brought that forward as a miscellaneous statute proposal because it makes such pre-eminent sense. The opposition quite rightly identified that there's a broader policy question at play, because the way you bring that forward in the Companies Act, which is an act of general application, is to allow an exemption which not just in theory but in actuality could allow the minister responsible to bring forward to the Lieutenant Governor in Council a proposal for an exemption for another company.

But there is no other company for which that type of proposal is being made, and the assurances have been given that this was intended. It was being brought forward for this particular circumstance, which is not to say that there couldn't be another circumstance where it might be appropriate. It was also indicated that broader public policy discussion with respect to the residency requirement for directors was being undertaken by the Department of Government Services as they undertook to review the Business Corporations Act in its entirety and, presumably at the same time, the Companies Act.

I was a little discouraged. I wasn't discouraged by the opposition not agreeing to it going to miscellaneous statutes, because you could always have a debate. I was discouraged by the suggestion that there was somehow a disingenuous motive or intention, and I was discouraged by the failure of the opposition and the third party to leap forward to help a company that's doing such good work, to allow it to continue to stay with Edmonton as its head office. I was particularly discouraged by the comments that were made on the record in debate in Committee of the Whole, particularly where we're talking about: this could have been done as a private member's bill.

Mr. Speaker, if you can call this a violation of the process, it would have been a much worse violation of the process to ask a standing committee of this House, the Private Bills Committee, to waive all of the requirements for a private bill in terms of the advertising requirements, in terms of the petition requirements and all the time frame requirements, ask them to give cursory consent to a hearing, which the Private Bills Committee usually has, and to prejudge what that standing committee of the House would determine in terms of such a hearing. The time frames in terms of having the bill brought to the House, referred to the committee, reported back to the House: to waive all of those process steps would have been a much larger breach of any process than bringing forward this simple amendment, which will allow on appropriate review the Lieutenant Governor in Council to grant an exemption.

So this is by far the better methodology than abrogating that private bills process. Abrogating that private bills process in that way, Mr. Speaker, would have then set a precedent for anyone else who missed the time frames and who had a matter of an urgent nature to again request that process to be abrogated, and we would have, I would suggest, faced far more possibilities of requests on an urgent basis for changes to be made in that manner than we're going to have from the concern that's been raised about opening the floodgates to one of the 2,000 part 9 companies in this province coming forward and asking for a director's exemption. Clearly, in granting any form of an exemption to any other applicant, it'll have to be reviewed, and there will have to be a conscious and rational reason for an exemption to be granted.

Let me also state, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a unique circumstance. We do this all the time with respect to the foreign ownership of land regulation. I believe it's in the Land Titles Act or the Law of Property Act, where there are foreign ownership of land regulations

and requirements with respect to citizenship or residency relative to the ownership of land. There is a provision that you can go to the Lieutenant Governor in Council for an exemption from those regulations in appropriate circumstances. Two or three times a year, maybe more often, those types of exemptions are granted.

Now, that's not the type of thing that needs the scrutiny of the Legislature. Usually it involves a specific incident, a specific circumstance where the criteria are brought forward in terms of the applicant for the exemption, and they have to show that the exemption is required for a valid reason. That's presumably the same process that would be in place with respect to this limited area of part 9 companies under the Companies Act. It's not a floodgate. There are only 2,000 of those companies. There's no guarantee that any other company would be granted an exemption.

I do grant that in passing this particular bill, it opens the door for someone else to ask for the exemption, and presumably in similar circumstances that request should be examined. This is not a disingenuous way of opening the door or floodgate for any other purpose. The sole purpose for bringing this bill forward, as I indicated to both opposition parties in the past when we raised this issue, was to deal with this circumstance, which is of an urgent nature and needed to be dealt with immediately or we risked losing a very important not-for-profit research company from this city of Edmonton.

3:20

For people who seem to believe that they're the only people who ever speak for this city, I can tell you that they're not. In fact, this hon. member and members in this government other than members in the capital region caucus were very keen to move quickly to ensure that we retained this jewel.

So I'd ask all members to vote for this bill in third reading.

Ms Blakeman: Well, I've been prompted to enter the discussion again. I was just going to let this go to a vote, but the remarks of the minister encouraged me to get to my feet again. I think that we have to be very careful here, because there's an interesting little exchange going on. I have to be very clear, and I also have to look to the minister to be able to put the fullness of the discussion before the Assembly.

I was very clear, when I spoke on this bill yesterday, on the support that was coming from the Official Opposition, and I included the third party opposition as well because their support was equal in our eagerness to assist the organization that was listed, the cancer research group. We were very concerned. We were very supportive of this organization. We did our due diligence. We contacted them. We spoke to the university. Phone calls flew back and forth between myself and the minister's office as we tried to make suggestions on how to accomplish what this group was seeking.

My concern about this debate is that it is removing yet another legislative opening, legislative process, legislative opportunity from this Assembly, never to come on this floor again. So one more opportunity to have this debated in the open, in public, covered by *Hansard* with members of the public able to come and listen to it has been removed from this House, and I see that happening too many times, Mr. Speaker.

My conversations back and forth with the minister and with his staff were about: "Yes, we want to help this company stay here. We want those jobs to stay here. We're proud of what they bring to our city. We would like to assist them."

What was being proposed in miscellaneous statutes is now exactly repeated in what we see before us in Bill 35. It is not being done for this one company. This is not a window to help one company. This

is a door through which all others may forever march if they so choose. My point is that they don't march through this Assembly any more, Mr. Speaker. They march through the cabinet and behind closed doors, and all we ever hear about it is if people are monitoring the *Gazette* and see the order in council spit out on the other side. That's my concern with what was going on here, and it's why I insisted that it get removed from miscellaneous statutes, as is the opportunity that is afforded to the opposition with miscellaneous statutes.

So, you know, I'm interested in the selected excerpts that the minister was sharing with us during his debates, in which he put my concerns about the process on the record but neglected to share the rest of my 15- or 20-minute debate from yesterday on how important it was to assist this company.

My concerns with what was originally proposed are still here, as you can see, Mr. Speaker. Why do I think it's important that we hang onto those residency requirements? People are saying, "Oh, come on. It's a global marketplace. We're all going to be global now, and we shouldn't be restricting directors to being 50 per cent Albertans. You're not getting with the swing of the new economy here, Laurie." And I say: well, yeah, I understand that. But I still say that we are talking about a situation where these part 9 nonprofit companies are eligible for grants from the Alberta government, and those grants come through taxpayers' money. Some of them have charitable status, and that has repercussions under the tax act, and that is in effect forgone revenue for the people of Alberta.

Do I have concerns when I'm watching money from the people of Alberta potentially flow through to a group and leave Alberta? Yeah, I do, and I'm not ashamed of that. I'm not ashamed of saying that I want to see that under scrutiny on the floor of the Assembly when that's going to happen. That won't happen with the passage of this bill now. Any of those 2,000 part 9 nonprofit companies can now approach the government, and it can go through the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is cabinet – they're in cabinet meetings – and they can get their residency requirements waived. If they pop, and nobody knows unless they happen to be an avid reader of the *Gazette*, which I don't think many people are.

That is what my concern is all about, that ultimately there's another process moving behind closed doors. I think there's the potential here for Alberta taxpayers' money, which I think should be for the most part for the benefit of Albertans, to now be going elsewhere, that they may not realize that that's where it is, and they don't have any say in how that happens.

So those were my concerns around this. In refusing it to go through miscellaneous statutes, we do have the opportunity to put these remarks on the record. The Minister of Justice has done so, I have done so, and we will now have a vote on third reading of this act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

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

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 15 students from the Innisfree Delnorte school. They are

accompanied today by two supervisors, Deanna Ford and Joyce Baker. Innisfree may not be the biggest school in Alberta, and it certainly, as I pointed out to the Minister of Infrastructure, is not the newest. However, it has continually produced some of the best students in Alberta, and from its small numbers they have achieved incredible success. I was honoured to have them in our office and try and answer some of their questions that the Minister of Transportation may have been more suitable to answer. It would be an honour, I think, for the Assembly to recognize these people. I'd ask the students and supervisors to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading
Bill 35
Companies Amendment Act, 2004
(*continued*)

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm also pleased to rise to speak to third reading of Bill 35. I, also, wish to express my disagreement with the comments of the hon. Attorney General and Government House Leader with respect to the rationale of this bill. Certainly, I think the minister was persuaded that the provisions contained in this bill ought to have been removed from the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act because they represent a broad policy rather than just a routine administrative change. The question is whether or not the bill ought to provide the opportunity for all companies to be exempted from this provision.

I also would like to indicate that I would have been prepared to support a specific provision in the case of this company. What the government has chosen to do is take this authority to make an exemption from the nonprofit corporations requirement that at least 50 per cent of the members of the board of every company shall be resident Albertans and give the cabinet the authority to exempt any company that they choose.

The question for us, then, is: do we trust this government with this particular power that this bill is going to give to them? You know, certainly for the part of the New Democrat opposition, we do not.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, this is a continentalist government, and they have been doing whatever they can to erase the border between Canada and the United States. I hear thumping opposite, so obviously some members at least of this government are admitting through their thumping that they agree with this. Otherwise, they would not be applauding the statement that I made, which in any other Assembly would have provoked howls of outrage. Here they just applaud. So we see the government through its actions on the Canadian Wheat Board, through its actions in dealing with BSE working for ever-greater harmonization with the United States.

We had the spectacle of the Premier and the government at the outset of the Gulf War eager to support the United States' invasion of Iraq. Again there's applause around the Chamber, Mr. Speaker. Thank God we don't have Canadian young men and women in that quagmire over there. If it had been up to this government, we would have had dozens of Canadian young people killed by now in a useless war fighting for control of the world's oil supplies. Systematically the government chooses every opportunity it can to attack the federal government of Canada and to support the American government of George W. Bush.

Now, the question is: given that political reality are we going to

trust this government to eliminate the residency requirements for nonprofit corporations operating in Alberta? I say no, Mr. Speaker. I don't trust this government on this matter, and I think that they'll use the opportunity to approve at every stage the elimination of the residency requirements. In my view this is equivalent to just taking out the residency requirement altogether, because anybody that asks for it is going to get it. I think the record speaks for itself.

I happen to believe that it's very important that we retain residency requirements for boards of directors operating in this province and in this country. We ought to stand up and defend our sovereignty in this respect. So the New Democrat opposition will not be supporting this particular provision. The government could have made an exceptional bill that would have dealt with the specific case, and they ought to have done so. We will not support this. We want to make absolutely clear that we are not saying that we don't support the change for the particular company in the circumstances that have been provided. It can be supported in this particular case, but it ought to be the Legislature as a whole that makes that decision and not this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View on the Standing Order provision.

Ms Haley: I guess I just wanted some clarification from the hon. member on his comments about having young Canadians killed over there because of something that this government would have done. The fact is that we were supporting an ally, who I happen to believe may not be totally wrong here after watching what I saw yesterday on television of a young person having his head removed by terrorists. I'm a little concerned that you're not aware that we are in fact in Afghanistan, that we have our young men and women over there trying to help them establish some kind of democratic life not just for the men of that country but for the women of that country, that were totally and completely done under by a group of religious fanatics.

I just want to know, hon. member: are you aware of the gravity of that situation? Do you have to inject innuendo and allegations against people's motivations in here on a never-ending basis? Do you have to somehow find a way to tie something as innocuous as this bill back into a global conflict that we're all in and that we should all be paying attention to?

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to indicate to the hon. member that I am indeed conscious and aware of what's going on. My remarks were related to this government's support, which was aborted at the last minute, for the illegal American invasion of Iraq, and I want to indicate that that would have been a grave mistake. Had this government had its way, Canada would have been in there participating in this illegal invasion and abuse of the Iraqi people.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is still available.

Then the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to conclude the debate.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just conclude with a few remarks in response to Edmonton-Centre and Edmonton-Highlands.

First of all, Edmonton-Centre indicated that I hadn't quoted all of

her remarks, and of course that would be unnecessary because they are printed for time immemorial in *Hansard*. So everybody can read *Hansard* and know what it was that she said in Committee of the Whole.

I was particularly concerned, though, about the comments that were made about the government, and presumably, then, she's referring to me because I've been the one who's been shepherding this. Even though it falls within Government Services and is sponsored by Edmonton-Glenora, I was talking to her about this one. To suggest that I was somehow trying for a broader purpose – I just wanted to have on the record that that was wrong, that the sole purpose for which I was bringing this forward and pursuing this option was to deal with this company.

The fact that the appropriate amendment to the Companies Act to allow that to happen might make it available to some others of the 2,000 part 9 companies is in fact correct, and I've acknowledged that. But that's not the purpose for bringing it forward, that's not the intention to use it, and this is not some great government conspiracy to take all of our part 9 companies abroad and dissipate the government's and, therefore, the people's wealth somewhere else but this province. I just wanted to put that on the record and make that perfectly clear.

This doesn't always have to be about some hidden agenda. The opposition can take some of these things at face value and understand that people try to do good things on a day-to-day basis to ensure that this province gets to continually move ahead and the people of this province get to have a quality of life and health status which they deserve. That's the purpose. That's the agenda. I always feel that one has to get up and correct the record all the time, because for every time you try and move forward, there's someone in the opposition, sometimes the Member for Edmonton-Centre, who's suggesting that you're being disingenuous or that there's some ulterior motive or some other reason for doing this.

Now, the reasons for this bill being brought forward in the format it is. I've talked about how inappropriate it would have been to disembowel the private members' process for the purpose of this one-off issue. It would also be inappropriate to bring into a broad-based act a specific reference to an individual company. It wouldn't be appropriate to do that in the act. One of the things we ought to do is make sure that our legislation is written appropriately and consistently. So this, in my view, is the best way possible to achieve the aim that we want to achieve without changing the public policy in any dramatic way, and because it's a part 9 act and not all companies under the Business Corporations Act, it is, in my view, appropriate to do it this way.

The hon. member indicated in debate that she was concerned about taxes or public money somehow going abroad. Well, she's surely aware, because of her involvement with not-for-profit organizations, that there are many not-for-profit organizations incorporated in many different ways. Societies and others can have access to grants from the Wild Rose Foundation or others. People can raise money in this province through casinos, and those monies go offshore to communities in India to support schools and all sorts of other good works. We do that; we ought to do that; we ought to continue to do that.

The question of residency of directors is not the issue with respect to taxes or public money, whether it's here or whether it's going offshore. It's a question of whether there's an appropriate accountability process in place for that public money and how it is handed out. I would say to the hon. member that there is an appropriate accountability process for all the money that's given out by organizations like the Wild Rose Foundation and the Ministry of Gaming and others.

3:40

With respect to the comments from Edmonton-Highlands about trust, that's about what I would expect from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. Of course he doesn't trust this government. It's his sworn duty to defeat this government. But this government has a very good record of appropriate consideration of issues; for example, under the foreign ownership of land regulations. Albertans trust this government, and this government is going to make sure that the right decisions are made in appropriate circumstances. Right now it's the right decision to make to keep this company an Alberta company and an Edmonton company doing good things for this city, and I'm just sorry that you won't help us do it.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

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

**Bill 32
Appropriation Act, 2004**

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Okay. I seem to have three or four. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to take the opportunity to continue some comments about Bill 32, the Appropriation Act, 2004. I had the opportunity earlier in debate to hear from the minister, and we talked about a lot of things. One of the things that we didn't explore was the lack of any provisions in the budget to deal with the tuition problem and, in fact, the postsecondary programs in the province.

I was reviewing the work of the Auditor General with respect to the Department of Learning and the performance measures that they have with respect to public satisfaction and with the affordability of the learning system and the report where they indicate that they are making progress in delivering high-quality learning experiences and opportunities for Alberta students. The Auditor General has taken issue with the policies of the government in this area. He comments in a number of areas, and I'd like to point them out this afternoon because I think it really is unfortunate that the budget has not taken the complaints of students, their parents, and the concerns of a number of Albertans very seriously with respect to postsecondary learning in the province.

In the survey that they conducted indicating that fewer Albertans think that the learning system is affordable, the drop in the numbers is quite dramatic, Mr. Chairman. Seventy-five per cent of the people surveyed in 2001 thought that the system was affordable. That was down to 63 per cent in 2002, and that's down to 52 per cent in 2003. So almost a 25 per cent drop in the number of people who feel that the postsecondary system is affordable. The Auditor General comments on that. Well, he relates it to the policy later in the report.

One of the things that he indicated was that there's some difficulty with the measures that they're using: that they're trying to measure too much at once, that they're trying to measure students, taxpayers, and different components – basic education, postsecondary apprenticeship – all at the same time, that you can't really tell what's caused the decrease in the results. I think that for students and for people who are interested in the postsecondary institutions, the

reason is really very obvious, and that's the dramatic rise in tuition and the lack of any real program to address it other than to make possible larger and larger student loans.

The Auditor General also took issue with the income levels that were used in the survey to indicate at what income level the financial barrier seems to kick in with respect to participation in learning opportunities. The study that the government uses and quotes from all the time uses the thresholds of \$40,000 and under and \$70,000 and more as income levels in looking at categories for determining reasons for not attending postsecondary education. The Auditor General makes the remark that there seems to be no justification for either number and, really, that the numbers that are produced are rendered useless without that kind of specification. We really don't know from the surveys given by the government the effect of rising tuition fees on participation in postsecondary education of eligible students at different income levels, at least as interpreted by the government.

A further complication for the Auditor General was that the participation rates for students eligible for colleges or technical institutions weren't measured, so they concentrated on universities but ignored a large part of the postsecondary programs of the province. Again, the admonishment from the Auditor General was that they should measure those other institutions and they should measure the impact of fees on the other institutions to see what kind of effect they're having on participation rates, the number of students that end up in these institutions.

He concludes in this section of the report, "Without periodically measuring the effectiveness of the tuition fee policy and related programs, the Department may not achieve its intended outcome." I think that that's a very important statement and one that the government has not taken seriously thus far. We didn't see the provisions in the budget, again, to address the matter of tuition and its effect on students in this province.

A second area that we didn't see addressed in the budget was the whole area of the cap, the 30 per cent cap. The Auditor General went through and indicated in a number of places that the government has relied heavily on this 30 per cent cap, yet he found that the policy itself needed clarifying. It wasn't clear, he observed, what that 30 per cent cap actually meant. He went on to indicate, for example, that "universities are not deducting all of the sponsored research costs in the calculation of . . . operating expenditures" and that "tuition fee revenues in the first year of a new program are not . . . included in the cap calculation." The government assured them that they were, but that wasn't apparent from what the department had reported.

3:50

The period that was used to adjust the figures used in the cap and the allowable increase calculations is not included in the policy. He indicated that while the policy exempts certain fees,

it doesn't make allowances for situations where the fee for an exempt service is included in the overall tuition fee. This results in institutions that don't charge separate fees having a higher cap . . . than those that charge the separate fee.

So in his findings a number of policy problems with the tuition cap.

He also indicated that the policy is too difficult to administer, and then went on to give some examples. "The Policy requires that the annual increase in fees for instruction cannot exceed average amount per student prescribed by the Department," and "as the calculation of the actual annual allowable increase per student is done approximately 18 months after the institutions have approved the fees, the calculation is [certainly] not timely enough for prompt action" to be taken.

The final area that he had concern with – again, it goes back to this business of timing – was that one college in the province had actually exceeded the cap for three years and that because of the timing and the reporting and when the institutions make decisions about tuition, this could happen under the policy that we have before us.

So the concerns about tuition and tuition policy have been raised by the Auditor General, and they weren't, Mr. Chairman, addressed in the budget. We have yet to have what I think is absolutely necessary, and that's a long, hard look at how we finance and support postsecondary education in this province.

That's not just an Alberta problem. It's a problem that's felt across the country, and it involves the federal government. I think the time is long overdue when we should have had this province and the federal government sitting down and looking at how we can sustain our institutions, make them affordable and accessible to students, and make sure that they are of the high quality that we all want and to do that in the long term and to look at the next 20 years and to see how we can sustain this system, not only just sustain it but actually have it grow and flourish. I think it's a dereliction of duty for provinces not to take that seriously and put in place a plan for, first of all, dealing with the problem that would result in a plan for financing those schools in the future.

I don't think we can go along the way we are, ad hoc, adding 2 per cent here, 5 per cent there, and hope that that's going to solve the problem, particularly with respect to tuition. When you look at the dramatic increases, Mr. Chairman, it's frightening for those of us who have children or grandchildren and look to trying to put in place financial resources that will see them through in the future. As I said, it's frightening. I think the need to put in place a plan for financing of postsecondary schools is long overdue.

I think, Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude with those remarks. Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much. I'm pleased to get the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to the appropriation bill, because there were things that I didn't get a chance to speak to during the debate in some of the five ministries that I am the critic for. So I'm delighted to get additional opportunities.

I'll also note at this point that we're now debating the appropriation bill, expected to vote on it. Well, I debated the Community Development budget on March 30, the Solicitor General on April 27, the Department of Justice on April 28, Gaming on May 4, and Seniors on May 6. Now, I wouldn't have expected to get a turn-around on answers on the last two, but I was kind of hoping that I might have got some kind of response back to my questions on at least the first one or the first couple. I always struggle with voting on the appropriation bill when I've got questions that are out there that haven't been answered, because that influences my support or lack of it for the budget.

At this point perhaps I'll get all of those things in by tomorrow, and I'll have a chance to read through them all and be able to vote on the budget. I don't think those kinds of fairy tales really come true any more, but it is a problem with the timing of the way we go through this process. I note that, you know, there are a lot more of the ministerial staff than there is of me, so I was kind of hoping I might get some answers there.

One of the issues that I had raised in a couple of different departments and, again, I think is one of those sort of orphan issues because it doesn't sit wholly and permanently with any one ministry – in fact, a couple of the ministers to whom I raised this issue said:

well, wait until the regional Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, and all will be revealed; all will happen. I was happy to attend that regional Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying, which took place in Calgary this past Thursday and Friday and maybe even Saturday. I was there on Friday, anyway. My concerns about this particular issue, which is the funding of sexual assault centres, was reinforced as I went through that day.

I think that really my concerns are that the funding of these centres falls under Children's Services at this point, who actually is doing some funding, the Solicitor General, who is doing some funding. It should also include Justice, I think, because Justice and the Solicitor General end up so closely tied together and are dealing with victims of crime but also the Minister of Health and Wellness and, you know, Community Development, which looks after sort of the human rights aspect. If there is a minister that's charged with responsibility for women's issues, it still falls under that portfolio. So a lot of the portfolios that I'm responsible for.

My concern about this is that the funding and responsibility for the sexual assault centres are not completely falling under any one of the ministries that I have mentioned. What happens is that as a result nobody is responsible, and this group of agencies is constantly falling through the cracks. They are spending so much of their time scrambling for funds and applying to all of these different ministries trying to scratch together enough, peg together enough, sew a patchwork of project funding to fund their agencies and keep going. I really think that that's a problem. When I say to people, "Did you know that sexual assault centres don't get operating funding?" people are amazed. They're shocked. "You're kidding." "No. Really." "You don't mean that." "Yes, I do."

4:00

There is no one that is providing operating funding for this. They get a little bit of funding around court counselling from the Solicitor General, but there are fairly narrow parameters for that program. You know, you might have one person whose salary is partly paid through the project grant that's available under the Solicitor General for that court counselling piece. The Minister of Children's Services has also picked up a piece around counselling for children, but not all victims of sexual violence are children.

What are you supposed to do when you're dealing with people who have, as often happens, experienced their real trauma as adults? They're adult survivors of child sexual abuse. Well, they're not falling under the Minister of Children's Services purview any more. So now where do they go? Health and Wellness? Well, Health and Wellness doesn't deal with that. They punt them back to Justice or Solicitor General, and occasionally we get the minister of women's issues involved in this one as well.

So that's what I'm trying to get the government to understand, that this is so fractured, and I'm looking to this government for someone to take responsibility to put together whatever interdepartmental agency you need to make sure that this issue is addressed and these agencies are looked to.

The concern that had been raised with me and that I had as I read through the documents that were a preparation for the regional Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying was that the language about sexual violence didn't even turn up. Every time there was the phrase "family violence and bullying." That appeared I don't know how many times in the documents, but I was 20 pages into the document before sexual violence or sexual assault showed up the first time. That's part of the problem. It was not top of mind for people, so when you get into these breakout groups and they all start trying to describe what the problem is or the issue is or to find solutions, that section was not being discussed. Why? Because what

was constantly in front of people? Family violence and bullying. What was talked about? Family violence and bullying. Did we get the sexual violence, sexual assault included in that? No.

I went through all but one of the breakout groups. There were 16, I think, and as far as I know I went to all of them except for the one that was a special breakout group for aboriginal people. I was in one of the aboriginal ones but not the special breakout one. That issue came up once, and that's because I know a staff person was in that particular group.

When I questioned a little bit more during the coffee breaks and the lunch hour and things, what I was told was: well, that voice wasn't heard very loud in the community consultations. Well, no, because we don't have a lot of sexual assault centres in Alberta. Frankly, their staff are trying to do the job, struggling to find the funding. I mean, they're incredibly underresourced. How were they supposed to be getting out to all of these community consultations and getting their agenda up at the top of the list? You don't have that many centres. I think there are less than a dozen in Alberta to start with, so even if you took every executive director and sent them out there, you're still not going to have a loud voice to get you on top of the list.

I know that I've spent a lot of time on this, and you've been very patient, Mr. Chairman, but, you know, somebody has got to champion this. This is the problem. Everybody keeps, sort of: well, nice idea; yeah, gee, we sure need to be concerned about that. Then they punt it off to somebody else. So, yes, I spent 20 minutes talking about it during the Children's Services debate, and I've probably spent another 20 minutes here, but if I'm the only one, then I'm the only one. I've identified this issue clearly now. I've explained to you why it's happened. I'm looking for the government to take charge of this. For heaven's sake, you are far more resourced than I am, and I've spent 40 minutes on it. If each of you spent 40 minutes on it, this would be done.

Mr. Hancock: For 40 minutes you want to spend \$40 million.

Ms Blakeman: No, it doesn't need \$40 million. As a matter of fact, there was an article in the *Edmonton Sun* on Tuesday, I think. I was talking about the surplus that is in the victims of crime fund, and they said to me: what would you do with that? I said: well, for starters you could fund these sexual assault centres for operating money. They did talk to Deb Tomlinson, who is their executive director or something, and she said: well, yeah, this is how much money we could use. The amount of money she said was \$5 million.

So it's not \$40 million, Mr. Attorney General. I understand the play on words there, but I'm just going to keep pitching those strikes to you, sir. What we really need is 5 million bucks, and that's not a lot of money in the scheme of things. So see what we can do about that one because I sure hope I don't have to give the same 40-minute speech next year. I'm sure we can deal with that.

Now, I'm going to go back, and I've brought with me the notes that I made when I was debating various budgets. The one that I was most short on time for was the Solicitor General's debate, so I'd like to complete the rest of the concerns and questions that I had, and I know that the minister will respond in writing to me, sooner rather than later I hope, with the answers on some of these.

The integrated crime. The Solicitor General set up the integrated organized crime and gang enforcement unit, which I think is referred to as IROC. I think it turns up on page 385 of the estimates. It's not mentioned specifically there, but I'm wondering what's going on with this IROC organization or with this agency. What is the funding for it? What are the operations that it's now involved in? I mean, I'm not talking secrets here, but what exactly is the unit now doing?

It was set up, and then we sort of hear it referred to but not with a great deal of detail. So on the record then, Madam Minister, if I could get what the operations are. What's going on here? What is the effectiveness of it? We heard an awful lot about it last June, and now it's not turning up in either the business plans or the estimates. So where is it? Where's the funding for it? Has the funding stopped? Is it not in this budget, or has it been turned over to the local police agencies to fund themselves? What's the deal here?

The sexual offender registry was much talked about by the Solicitor General a year or two ago I guess. I'm wondering: could we get an update on that? You know, how much is it used? How many hits on the site? How many people have been captured as a result of that?

The reason I'm asking is that it looks like a recent U.S. Department of Justice report of 10,000 sexual offenders in the States shows that 43 per cent of sexual offenders had been rearrested for any offence. That included sexual offences but also things like robbery, drug trafficking, highway violations I'm assuming, anything. That compares with a 68 per cent recommit rate for other criminals. So the recommit rate for sexual offenders is actually lower, and I thought: oh, that's not at all what I expected to see. That was a surprising statistic.

That brought to mind: okay; well, then, how is our registry doing? How many hits? How many people did it bring down? What is the effectiveness rating happening there?

On the MLA policing review we ended up with some things that were not really dealt with in the final report, and I'm just wondering if we can get a bit more detail. At one point there was a recommendation to look at unstaffed aerial drones, kind of little spy plane things out there flying around spying on those cows and chickens. [interjection] It is. It is too much fun that one. I had a great deal of fun with it the first time it was recommended, but it sort of dropped off the radar screen, if you will forgive the pun. I'm just wondering what happened with that. It was sort of not mentioned again, so I'm looking for the update status report, so to speak, on that one.

Another thing. The whole photoradar issue was just kind of slid off to the side of the table but left on the table. So where are we with that? Is it going to be followed through or not? Yes? No? Who's going to be responsible? More of it? Less of it? What's happening?

4:10

The deputy constables were given a nod in the final report, but that's the last we heard. We are looking to have how many of them put in place? Where? By when? What kind of training standards? And I'm particularly interested in the details about the training standards compared to what the training standards are for what I would call a regular police officer. If I could also maybe get this on a grid with comparisons to the kind of training and criteria that the special constables have. If I could get that information, that would be helpful.

Centralized training facility. Now, we were looking for that. Is there going to be some sort of sod-turning on that this year or the taking over of an existing building? Are we going to see a centralized training facility in Alberta in this fiscal year? If we're not, where does it come in the three-year rolling plan? Where does it come in the 20-year plan? I'd like to get a detailed update on what expectations, timing, and budget allocations are for a central police training facility.

Finally, the Amber Alert. Now, the last time the Amber Alert was used, two of the media outlets are adamant they did not receive the information. The minister must have done an investigation on that. I asked a question in the House. She, in fact, denied that that happened, but the Premier later confirmed in media statements that

there were glitches. So what has been looked at? What's been done to the program to try and address the concerns that came there? There was something that happened. I'm trying to remember what the media outlets were. I know that there were two of them. Maybe they're both radio stations. If we could hear the details on that one, that would be helpful, please.

I think those are my comments for the Solicitor General.

Now I'm going to move to the Department of Justice and Attorney General. The area that I was not able to fully explore with the minister was around mediation and restorative justice, and I very quickly in the last couple of minutes made a slapdash plea for funding rates for mediators that are used by the department. My concern was that we are trying to develop a professional layer of people here that provide services. We want the mediation and restorative justice services to be used. The minister is quite a leader in this. In some cases I think he gets ahead of everyone, and they're kind of scrambling to catch up there. He's a leader in implementing things like alternatives to the court system that still provide justice, things like mediation services and restorative justice techniques.

There are two issues here. One is around the funding of the Edmonton restorative justice centre. They have been struggling along for some time, and it seems that they were in for some funding. Somebody was supposed to take responsibility for it, and then something happened. The minister turned over or something, and they never got the grant. It never came through.

I do note that they were very quick to tell me that the current minister's office did find space for them – and they're very grateful for that – but that really they have no stability in their programming right now because they don't have operating funding. They recently shut down their victim/offender mediation program, and that program had been running from '94 to '04, so 11 years actually, and they just had to shut it down. They work on the UN principles of restorative justice.

They originally had seed funding from the Muttart, from the Rotary, from the Edmonton Community Foundation, and they needed to move into stable, predictable, long-term funding from the government, and that seems to have stumbled somewhere.

So if I can put in the plea to the minister – I mean, we know that this works, and we know that victims and the court system and offenders and everybody seem to be very happy with the justice of the results. It doesn't take up court time. [Ms Blakeman's speaking time expired]

I will get another opportunity, I hope, later to put more comments on the record. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just briefly to comment on some of the issues related to Justice and particularly to say thank you for the very nice comments you made with respect to the mediation processes. It is indeed one of the areas that we are trying to move forward on to make sure that the spectrum of dispute resolution in the province is as broad as it can be and that people have the opportunity to have their disputes resolved in a fair, effective way that's accessible on a timely basis and that is very affordable, obviously collaborative law processes in family law, mediative processes in other civil dispute areas, expanding the jurisdiction of the Provincial Court and then putting in the mediation processes there. There are, I would acknowledge, areas that we need to expand on. It's difficult to find resources always in a tight system, but we have to find better ways to resource the mediation process.

In comments in committee you raised the question of increasing the honorariums. We're finding that we have a significant number

of people who agree to put their names forward on the list because it's a good training process as well. It gives them good experience, and they can then take that experience and market it. So there's not a shortage of mediators, but I would acknowledge that the honorarium of \$100 for a two-hour session, possibly split between two mediators, is modest in the extreme.

By the same token, we have DSROs and DROs in Edmonton and Calgary. These are senior family law practitioners who volunteer their time to act, in essence, in the mediation process so that disputing parties can come forward. Instead of going to court, they can sit down with a DRO and have that DRO help them work through what a court would award and then come to a consent order basis. Those are done on a volunteer basis. They're pilot projects, but they've proved very successful.

I just wanted to mention that on the record and again say thank you on the record to the senior members of the family bar in Edmonton and Calgary who volunteer their time for those projects. It's very nice that they volunteer their time. It's a wonderful project, but I don't know how long we'll be able to expect that they will continue once we've determined how effective the process is, and it is very effective both at helping people get good answers and helping people get good resolution to their problems, helping them to participate in their own resolution. That's very important.

I've also been very supportive of the restorative justice processes. I think that they are ways in which people can actually get some finality, some closure, particularly in the criminal justice area, to their events, groups such as the Community Conferencing society in Edmonton and other groups that have come forward have engaged in a very meaningful way in the system to help people with dispute resolution in those cases with resolution of problems of a criminal nature and the work that the conferencing society has done with, for example, the Edmonton public school board with respect to working in the schools and helping resolve bullying matters in a restorative justice context, in bringing that all together – very good work.

Of course, one of the problems always is that there are a number of community organizations of people who are prepared to put their time and effort forward, but they get always held up on the basis of proper resourcing. That's an issue that we have to deal with. We have to find a way to bring similar type groups together so that we can provide adequate resourcing to do the administrative functions and leave them to explore their passion with respect to making communities a safer place. That's not a finished project by any stretch of the imagination. That needs more work.

There are some good things on the forefront. In Calgary, for example, coming out of the domestic violence project there is a group that is bringing together a family violence resource centre – that's not the right name for it – a place where all of the agencies, the police, the health services people, the counselling people can be collocated and not lose any of their independence with respect to what they're doing but share some of the administrative burden in terms of the operational side and provide a place where people know they can go to get assistance and a fast response.

4:20

So there are very, very good things happening in the community, and one of the things we have to be certain we don't do as a government is get in the way of those good things happening. But one of the things we ought to do is find better ways to support administratively and to encourage those groups so that they are not using their efforts on fundraising and on administration but that they are using their efforts in the community doing the work that they have chosen to come forward and do to make their communities a safer and better place.

So I appreciate the comments from the hon. member which allowed me to put those comments on the record.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. I'm just going to continue in the same vein there because I think this is important. The minister is right. There's the opportunity here to create that partnership and, more importantly, the facilitation of a process. We've built ourselves into a society that's sort of lost the ability to resolve our own disputes, and we tend to immediately turn to either the police or the courts and say: okay; somebody else decide this and fix it. What we've ended up with is absolutely, you know, packing the courts with a lot of disputes that really as human beings and good citizens and decent people we should be able to figure out ourselves. It also takes a huge cost burden off that justice system and often the police resources as well. Frankly, taxpayers end up paying for all of this, so if we can figure out a way to do this that accomplishes the same end or a better end for less money, then I think we should be doing it.

The issue here – and it's the issue that the minister touched on at the very end – is really about capacity of the agencies to support the work. When I talk about a partnership, I'm talking about, you know, the nonprofit agencies that exist, like the restorative justice centre in Edmonton, who administers the program, organizes the people, trains them, certifies them, tests them, schedules everybody to go out and be where they're supposed to be, does the intake on who's requesting mediation or restorative justice services, all of that sort of thing that, frankly, can be done very efficiently by a nonprofit organization, but that organization needs support. They need the capacity to be able to do that. The minister is right and I'm right about having that agency run around trying to find money all the time, and then they're not doing all the rest of those things that I listed, and that's what's missing here.

So I'm going to continue to press the minister because I think he's the one that needs to take the lead on this, and I know that there's often confusion between: where does this one fall? Solicitor General? Attorney General? I think it's going to have to fall under the Attorney General, and we need him to take the lead on this one and charge ahead with it, because I think it's probably going to fall most under him, and to make sure that that proper resourcing, his words there, is available so that those organizations have the capacity to actually go forward and do this work.

We all win at the end of this. We don't have those, you know, time-consuming and difficult cases in the courts when we could be learning how to resolve them better outside the court system and still achieve the justice and the punishment sometimes and the redemption that we're seeking here.

The other part of this – and I disagree with the minister more here, and I'm going to press him more on it – is around the honorarium for the mediators. He's saying: well, we've got no lack of people that are lining up to do this. But, you know, the process that's in place is that mediators have to do 10 free mediations before they're even considered to go on the list to be eligible to do this mediation for a hundred dollars for two hours. Mediators almost always work in tandem, so you really are talking fifty bucks apiece for two people to do two hours of work. That's a very poor showing.

If we are trying to create a group of people who are professionals and who will develop professional standards, have an organization that makes sure that they are properly trained and that there is a professional standard that they meet and that there's certification and that they're retested and all of those things that society has come to expect, then we are looking at a profession there. That's not to say that there aren't very good people who do this as a volunteer, and

it's not to say that they shouldn't be allowed to volunteer to do that if they choose.

The problem here is that we're sort of getting engaged in compulsive revoluting and saying that this is a needed thing. We're recognizing the talent or the ability or the training of people in the community to do it, and then we're saying: well, we want you to do this all to a very high standard, but we're going to pay you almost no money to do this.

While the minister is saying that he's got a lineup of people to take on these 10 free ones before they start getting paid \$50, I'm also hearing from others. They won't go there. They don't want to get caught in that loop where they would end up being paid 25 bucks basically to do this. So he's missing out on a group of equally trained and talented people who just don't want to get in his system, and I think that's a problem. That's a warning signal to me. If we are serious about this, if we want to move more people into this system, then I think we need to take it seriously and we need to value it. I think that putting a hundred bucks on two people for two hours is not valuing this system.

The last point I want to make to that is the two-hour time limit, and I referred to this some time ago, I think, when I first talked about it. Expecting that you're going to close a mediation in two hours flies in the face of everything that mediation is to be about. It's to allow people to come to those agreements in their own time. Putting two hours on it says that you've got to solve this problem in two hours. It's an anathema to the way this process works.

I'm not saying that you set it up so everybody just, you know, sits around with their feet up and drinks coffee forever. That's not the point. You are trying to resolve this situation, but judging the success of it by either the number of cases that you've closed or by saying, "You've got a time limit of only two hours and then it's done," is not the way that this particular process should be judged at all. It's the antithesis of it, and I think it gets us into trouble.

Those were the issues I wanted to bring up around the mediation and restorative justice.

From the Justice department – just let me check the rest of my notes here. Oh, yeah, just at the very end there. On page 35 of his annual report I notice that 4,121 more people received legal aid services than was the eligible number. I'm sorry; I didn't explain that very well. Can the minister explain why 4,121 people more than the eligible number of people received legal aid services? I'm wondering: why does he identify it as the demand for it? Why is that so much higher, and who is it that's receiving these legal aid services? Who are the extra people here?

I'm just going backwards through my notes. Oh, yeah, that is it. Okay. So I managed to get the rest of those on the record, or it looks like some of my colleagues also asked questions that covered that stuff. That's good.

The Gaming ministry is the other one that I have here. The only issue outstanding on the Gaming ministry was the disagreement between the minister and the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, which produced a study on VLT gambling and the lack of resources to support or to treat problem gamblers. The minister came out very quickly saying: oh, well, this was a very small sample; I think there were 206 that were involved in the study, and that makes it too small to take seriously.

4:30

In fact, if the minister looks at the study, they were interviewing people who actually were addicts, so this wasn't just going out and finding 206 people – I hope I've got that number right – on the street and questioning them about attitudes towards problem VLT gambling. They were actually interviewing people in places where

gambling takes place and talking directly to people who were either actively engaged in it or were self-identifying. From the reading I've done on this, that's indicating that you were actually working in the pool of people that you're talking about, and it makes that number much more valid.

I'm wondering why the minister sort of continues to attempt to trivialize the work that was done in that study because of the numbers there. I'm assuming he would know this. Actually, that was quite a valid number of people that they were working with. So if I could get his comments on that.

In the Community Development debates I was remiss in not asking questions about the human rights cases. Every year I like to get an update on the number of cases that were new, the number of cases that went on to the commission, which is always sort of the highest level there, and the number of cases that were resolved. Then that gives us a number on how many are sort of sitting in the middle of the process somehow.

I'd also be interested, if the commission keeps the statistics, in what number of cases were recommended to be resolved. In a case where the complainant wants some sort of resolution, the human rights staff usually go to the company and say: there's a complaint against you; are you willing to work with them or apologize or offer money as compensation or whatever? Then that counteroffer will be brought back to the individual. I'm wondering if there are any numbers kept on how many individuals accept that counteroffer from the company? I'm just interested in that for other reasons.

Those were the outstanding comments that I had from the original debates. I was able to get everything on the Seniors' budget. Thank you very much for the opportunity to get the rest of those on the record, and I look forward to receiving responses in writing to them.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 32 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd move that the committee rise and report Bill 32, the Appropriation Act, 2004.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 32.

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 4:36 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

