

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, May 17, 2005

1:30 p.m.

Date: 05/05/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Welcome.

Let us pray. Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask for guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to introduce a very special and distinguished group seated in the Speaker's gallery. They are called the CCAF fellows and are participants in a nine-month international fellowship program based in Ottawa. Today they are visiting us as part of a tour to western Canada.

The fellowship program is a collaboration between the office of the Auditor General of Canada, the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, and the Auditor General of Quebec. The program is sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency and is designed to expand knowledge and understanding of public-sector accounting and auditing as practised in Canada to help participants address auditing issues in their home environments.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce Mr. Sebastian Gil from Argentina, Mr. Carlos Modena from Brazil, Ms Claireann James from Guyana, Mr. Imran Iqbal from Pakistan, and Ms Reahla Balroop from Trinidad and Tobago. They are accompanied today by their hosts Mrs. Donna Bigelow, program co-ordinator, international affairs, office of the Auditor General of Canada in Ottawa; Mrs. Caroline Jorgensen, project and financial officer for international business at the CCAF in Ottawa; and Lori Trudgeon, communications co-ordinator with the office of the Auditor General of Alberta. Again, they are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the recipients of the first human service worker awards. The human service worker awards recognize Alberta Children's Services employees whose dedication to their work has improved the lives of Alberta children, youth, and families.

Scott Haggins is a caseworker with the southeast child and family services authority in Medicine Hat. Cory Jacob works for the northwest child and family services authority as a family support for children with disabilities worker. I'm extremely proud of these two individuals. With them today are Scott's colleague Samantha Kilford; Cory's wife, Vicki Jacob; and Irene Milton from Children's Services human resources. It is my pleasure to have them, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the entire House a

group of 15 students from Vincent Massey junior high. They are accompanied by three teachers: Andy Heaton, Leanne Jackson, and Erika Smith. I would ask them to please rise and receive the kind welcome from the House.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly my boss at the Legislature office. She's the one who tells me what to do and when to do it. She's my assistant, Marie Martin, and her husband, Bryce Martin. With them today are their many-year childhood friends, Robert and Fay Mearns, who reside in the city of North Vancouver, also employees of the city there. I would like them to stand and receive the warm welcome from the Assembly.

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

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two of my children: my daughter Julia Prins Vanderveen and my son Lorne. Julia just arrived from Vancouver, where she graduated with her master of divinity from Regent College. Lorne has just finished his first year of business at NAIT, and he'll be working in the oil patch this summer. He'll be capitalizing on the Alberta advantage and adding to the prosperity of our province. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a very fine young man I've known for some 13 years, since he was in grade 1 with my daughter. He's planning to attend NAIT this fall to study a program of bilingual business. He's a true Albertan, being of Ukrainian and French-Canadian descent. I would ask Mr. Dominic Mishio to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you two members of the Alberta Liberal caucus. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize them.

The first person is Mr. Ryan Bissonnette. Ryan started his career as a paramedic in the province of Ontario and worked night shifts through political science studies at the University of Toronto. He began his political career as a legislative assistant in the Ontario Legislature and then moved into federal politics, where he most recently worked as a special assistant to the Minister of International Trade. Ryan relocated to Alberta in April of this year to join the Alberta Liberal caucus as a research analyst. He's currently responsible for files of Municipal Affairs, Government Services, and Environment. Lastly, he also dared me to mention that he is single.

Second, I would like to introduce Gerri Kleim, who has joined our staff as an administrative assistant. Gerri was born in Whitehorse, Yukon, and she's a first-generation Canadian. She has worked with federal, provincial, and municipal governments and enjoys spending time with her husband and singing in their band. She has recently also picked up a hobby. She's trying to learn how to play the electric guitar.

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

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

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly an organization known as Together We Can community initiative. These youth workers run a youth crime prevention patrol, participate in community enrichment activities as well as lead information sessions for students and seniors on safety-related issues. I'd now ask that each of them rise as I call their name to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Jasmine Tolhurst, Miranda Tanfara, Lorelei Hamilton, Dean Reid, Corey Bourque, Daniel Klasson, Tammy Burns, Amanda Gilliland, Corenda Steinhauer, Elias Dudley, Bambi Greenall, Jaylene Hamilton, and Agnes Kamela.

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

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly today Elizabeth Sumamo. Elizabeth is joining the NDP caucus office staff this summer as a STEP assistant. Elizabeth is a recent graduate of the University of Alberta with a major in biological sciences and a minor in physical sciences. She's planning to attend graduate school in the fall in the program of health sciences at the U of A. I would now ask Elizabeth to please rise to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Olga Chirka. Olga is a constituent of Edmonton-Calder for the past 38 years. She is an avid gardener and active community member in our constituency. This is her first visit to the Alberta Legislature. I would ask that she now rise and receive the very warm traditional welcome of the House.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to join with the Member for Strathcona and also the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, who have advised us that we see a former flame, I believe, of the Deputy Premier in the gallery. I just couldn't resist doing this. He also was a councillor in Strathcona county. He's here at a recreation board meeting, I'm understanding, and his name is Bob Weller. I know that's way too much information. If I may also introduce a very strong director of recreation and parks and a stalwart in Strathcona county, Cliff Lacey, who accompanies him to keep him protected. If they would both stand, please, and receive the warm welcome.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Securities Commission

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The controversies surrounding the Alberta Securities Commission continue. The perception is widespread and growing that the ASC is operated by a cosy group of insiders with close ties to this government. This perception needs to be addressed if the ASC is to regain the credibility it needs to flourish in the future and maintain its position as an Alberta-based regulator. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Will the

minister tell the Assembly whether any candidates for chairman of the ASC have been recommended by the recruiting team, and if so, have they been accepted or rejected?

Mrs. McClellan: Well, Mr. Speaker, first, I'd like to set the record straight. I met with the part-time members of the commission as well as the past chairman about three weeks ago. There was really only one person of those people that I knew. So let's make that very clear and very straight. It would have been nice to have known any of these fine people, but frankly I did not.

Secondly, the search is continuing well. We have some interviews concluded, and it is our hope that in the next very short time, perhaps another two or three weeks, we will have a final decision on a full-time chairman.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: to eliminate any perception or reality of political interference in the selection of the ASC chairman or commissioners, will the minister end the practice of government MLAs participating in nominating part-time commissioners to the ASC?

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, if I recall correctly, I think the procedures for nominating part-time commissioners are that they are nominated externally and certainly can be nominated from within this House, from any party in this House.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we had quite a large number of very well-qualified persons that put their name forward to act as chairman of the Alberta Securities Commission. A difficult choice to come up with a final person because they were all very well qualified and submitted their requests for consideration quite independently.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can the minister tell this Assembly how many of the current part-time commissioners were endorsed or nominated by government MLAs?

Mrs. McClellan: I cannot. Most of the part-time commissioners – well, in fact, all were appointed before I assumed this ministry, and it would not have occurred to me to look at that. What you do look at are the credentials of the persons who sit on that commission, and I can tell you that all of them come very highly credentialed.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. leader for Lethbridge-East.

Sale of Social Housing Corporation Land

Ms Pastoor: The hon. leader for Lethbridge-East? Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I am the only person from Lethbridge-East, I guess I am a leader.

The Alberta Social Housing Corporation sold over 900 acres of land to a private developer in Fort McMurray. The government had previously sold land based on bad appraisal advice indicating that land was not fit for development, but, in fact, it was developed. The government continues to base land sale decisions on miscalculated appraisals. My question is to the minister of Seniors and Community Supports. What was the appraisal date used for this sale, and was there more than one appraisal submitted?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have responded to this

question previously. The preamble was inaccurate in regard to the amount of land that was for sale and some of the process that was referred to. In response to the question, there was one appraisal for this property, and that was in the fall of 2004.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister table a copy of the agreement for the sale so that we know the terms and conditions placed on the use of the land?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did respond to that question in the Legislature yesterday. I do have my staff looking into whether or not that is appropriate, given that there is a third party involved and also that the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act comes into play with this particular sale.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Again to the same minister: can the minister guarantee that the land earmarked for social housing will in fact be used to develop low-cost housing?

Mrs. Fritz: That is an excellent question. That's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I can guarantee that land that is earmarked through the Alberta Social Housing Corporation is definitely for low-cost housing. Especially in the Fort McMurray Area, for the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to know, what we may refer to as low-cost housing in the rest of the province in Fort McMurray they may call affordable housing for people that are in service positions such as the nurses, policemen, firemen, teachers. Those are the people that we are hearing back from that would like to see properties available.

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

For-profit Health Care

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A study comparing private, for-profit and not-for-profit hospitals in the United States revealed that for-profit ownership of hospitals results in a higher risk of death for patients. There is overwhelming evidence that contradicts the notion that the private sector is cheaper and more efficient than government. The truth is that for-profit health delivery results in higher costs, poorer outcomes, and more lawsuits. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given all the evidence of adverse effects in for-profit health care delivery, why does the government allow private, for-profit facilities to exist at all in Alberta?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to quarrel with studies that have been published on both sides of this issue. Let me give the example of HRC in Calgary and the specialized facility, which is part of the arthroplasty project where we are doing hip and knee replacements, and Health First in Strathcona on behalf of Capital health, in Red Deer in a clinic there. What we find, at least in this contractual arrangement with Calgary health and HRC, is that we are able to reduce the waiting times, reduce the waiting lists, and address the issue of capacity as quickly as possible. It's not so much a matter of money that we're discussing here but a matter of getting better access to patients in a timely fashion.

Ms Blakeman: Again to the same minister: why does the province

allow any private operators to receive taxpayer money to deliver long-term care?

Ms Evans: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, in excess of 30 per cent of the health budget is privately delivered, and I know that the hon. member is well aware of that. The long-term care projects have not only been delivered by private entrepreneurs but by nonprofit organizations, and communities have arranged those, sometimes, totally beyond the capacity of government's involvement. So why do we allow it, Mr. Speaker? It's been part of how we have evolved in long-term care in this province.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Again to the same minister: given that the private, for-profit long-term care provider Extencare employs political figures to lobby for its interests in America, what is the government doing to guarantee that business is conducted in a transparent and accountable manner as Extencare expands business within Alberta? How about a lobbyist registry?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, the item of a lobbyist registry is not under the domain of this minister.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Sale of Social Housing Corporation Land (continued)

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The seniors minister's refusal to be transparent about a shady multimillion dollar land deal in Fort McMurray is just the latest example of why this government is a worthy recipient of the top secrecy award from the Canadian Association of Journalists. It's pretty clear, based on the minister's nonanswers, that this government has plenty to hide about a deal involving the sale of hundreds of acres of prime real estate to a Tory-friendly developer. My question is to the minister of seniors. How can the minister claim that this isn't a private, cozy deal when there were no fewer than 22 developer groups interested in bidding on this prime real estate had the government decided, as it should have, to sell the land through an open-bid process?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I have responded to this question in the Legislature over the past two days, and my answers haven't changed. I'd invite the member to reread *Hansard*.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that the minister quoted property values based on a series of appraisal reports in the House yesterday, will she do the correct thing and table the reports from which she was quoting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was actually one appraisal – and I did mention that to the member opposite – that was completed on this land. Also, as I indicated, I asked the appropriate people involved about tabling such a document in the House, and my understanding is that because there is a third party involved, due to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act it cannot be tabled. [interjections] Yes, actually, that does include the appraisal, according to my information.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I don't know what's being hidden here.

What role, if any, did the Minister of Environment play in this private land sale in Fort McMurray?

Mrs. Fritz: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any other role that any other minister in this Assembly has been a part of with this land sale. It is through the Alberta Social Housing Corporation, and my ministry has full responsibility for the sale of properties through this corporation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace, followed by the Member for St. Albert.

Crop Insurance

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that Alberta's agricultural producers are in a tight situation this year with low commodity prices and high costs for everything from fertilizer to fuel. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Now that the production insurance sign-up deadline has passed, could the minister tell us whether these factors appear to have had any impact on participation in the production insurance program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member indicated, producers have completed electing their coverage levels for the production insurance for 2005 crops. Overall, I can tell the hon. member that the number of producers purchasing crop insurance this year, or production insurance, was consistent with the last couple of years. There was a slight decrease of the number of producers, about 3 per cent, but in actual fact we've seen a notable increase in the average number of acres being insured. So producers are trying to protect their remaining equity after a number of very difficult years.

For 2005 the majority of producers elected the higher levels of coverage. Where previously they tended to purchase 60 to 70 per cent coverage, this year they're now choosing the 70 or 80 per cent coverage. I feel very confident, Mr. Speaker, in saying that producers recognize that peace of mind comes from transferring some of the risk they face to the government's risk management system.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental is again to the same minister. A month ago our government reduced premiums on the spring price endorsement, or SPE, available through the production insurance program and increased benefits on revenue insurance coverage. Could the minister tell us if these initiatives had the intended effect of encouraging producers to take advantage of this market price protection coverage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct: we did reduce the premiums. Until we had reduced the premiums for the spring price endorsement, there was actually very little interest in the feature for the 2005 crop year. Once the announcement was made, about two weeks prior to the April 30 deadline it did become a main discussion point on the telephone lines with AFSC, where the office staff were helping producers considering their production insurance options.

I can say that the premium reduction has proved highly successful. With 40 per cent of the insured producers purchasing the spring price endorsement, it's a 50 per cent increase over 2003, the previous best year for that particular part of the plan. When you compare this year's spring price endorsement uptake to last year, it's over a 387 per cent increase in that uptake. Producers who purchase that are automatically eligible under the revenue insurance. As well, the variable price benefit and the spring price endorsement have all been calculated into that, and we'll see what the results are at the end of the year.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

School Closures

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Students and parents deserve some straight answers from this government on school closures. Yesterday the Minister of Education said that the public school board's practice of transferring \$7 million from classrooms to maintain crumbling infrastructure and keep the lights on is simply part of the flexible funding framework. Flexibility is fine, but we need certainty here, sir, and we need to get clear on the impact of these policies. My first question to the Minister of Education: given that the documents obtained from the school board indicate that the government is putting a stop to this practice next year, is this transfer of instructional dollars away from the classroom allowed or not? Which is it, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Zwodzesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to review that question a little later. I want to just make it clear what I did say yesterday in the House because I think the hon. member has taken some liberties in the wrong direction. What I did say was:

Under the renewed flexible funding framework, which was worked out with, by, and for those school boards, they have the ability to shift around a significant amount of the monies that we provide to them, monies which, I might add, went up by \$287 million in this current budget to the largest amount ever for K to 12, \$4.3 billion.

I think the hon. member might wish to review what he just said and perhaps offer me an apology, which I would be happy to accept.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thanks for the lesson, Mr. Speaker.

To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: given that the class size reduction initiative is requiring schools to put more space into use, can the minister explain how school boards can operate and maintain that space when the operation and maintenance funding doesn't recognize this usage?

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The answer is quite simple. Edmonton public has roughly 160,000 square metres too much space.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the operation and maintenance funding is tied to utilization rates and not the needs of the facility, essentially guaranteeing that older schools fall into disrepair, how can the minister maintain that he has no responsibility for school closures?

Dr. Oberg: Because it is the Edmonton public school board. It is the responsibility of the public school boards to close schools and go through a school closure process, Mr. Speaker.

Quite simply, the hon. member has answered his own question when he was talking about why \$7 million had to be transferred over. It's because they have 160,000 square metres too much space that they are paying to heat and take care of.

The Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, do you want to raise a point of order at the conclusion of the Routine today with respect to an exchange between yourself and the hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports? Is this correct?

Mr. Mason: Yes, please.

The Speaker: I'll advise then.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

2:00 Postsecondary Education Review

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education. The budget and throne speech set out a plan for increasing postsecondary access by 60,000 places by 2020. The minister stated in the House that the Department of Advanced Education is conducting a comprehensive review of the system. Meanwhile, there have been recent announcements about significant capital expenditures at Grant MacEwan College and Mount Royal College. Can the minister advise the House what the scope of the review which is being conducted will be?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, in our 20-year strategic plan we've indicated the four pillars under the strategic plan: unleashing innovation, leading in learning, competing in a global marketplace, and making Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit. Of course, underpinning that is making sure that Albertans have the opportunity to advance their knowledge, skills, and education so that they can take advantage of the opportunities and trade in the world. So it is necessary to take a look at our postsecondary system to ensure that it's world leading, that Albertans have the best in-class opportunity to get the education they need to take advantage of those opportunities.

Based on that, we had a conference in January. We brought stakeholders together, and we talked about what was necessary. From that came the promise to create 60,000 new spaces over 20 years. The scope of the review will be to set out a policy framework for Alberta as a learning society and determine what we need to have in our system to be the world-leading postsecondary system and what we have now and what the gap analysis is.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister advise the Assembly whether or not the review will focus on the priority areas of access and affordability?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, access, affordability, and quality are, of course, the three key ingredients to a world-leading postsecondary institution. So, yes, we'll be focused on those as well as on the affordability equation, as we've talked about funding, what the cost of going to school is as well as how students finance that cost. Innovation and roles and responsibilities: we need to look at the institutions that we have and the roles they play both in their communities and in their geographic areas as well as in the context of the whole system. So the review will look at funding, it will look at access, it will look at quality, and it will look at how we fill the gaps that are necessary to ensure that we have opportunities for every Albertan to advance their education.

Dr. Brown: Can the minister assure the House that the review will be independent and geographically representative of all parts of the province?

Mr. Hancock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely. Our goal is to have a well-constructed steering committee that represents both the geographic nature of the province as well as the stakeholders in the province. The steering committee will have people who are familiar with the college role in rural colleges, the rural development issues, university issues, student perspective, faculty perspective. We need to make sure that it's a full, broad-based, varied look at the whole system and, as well, of course, have the opportunity to hear from Albertans. So it will be a full, complete, comprehensive review, which will culminate, hopefully, in an opportunity for the public to watch and participate in a conference which will have an informed discussion and lead to an informed conclusion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Arts Funding

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently many stakeholders in the arts community have come forward with serious concerns about the fate of the Visual Arts Alberta Association. Their concern is that this highly effective organization will suffer the same fate as Music Alberta and be eliminated without any consultation or accountability to affected members. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Why is the Visual Arts Alberta Association being subjected to a review by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts into areas that the AFA has no jurisdiction over?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, the AFA has much jurisdiction over the discretion to grant monies to various arts groups throughout the province of Alberta. It is appropriate that groups like the agency referred to by the hon. member be reviewed from time to time to determine whether or not there are any problems, to determine whether or not there are things that can be improved. Visual arts should be subject to the same kind of scrutiny and accountability that all other areas of government enterprise are subject to.

Mr. Agnihotri: Will this minister assure the 360 individual artists and the 26 groups that the VAAA represents that there is no hidden agenda to disband this organization? It happened to Music Alberta.

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I don't have time for all the things in our public agenda let alone a hidden agenda.

Mr. Agnihotri: Given that Music Alberta was subjected to a similar review and then disbanded with no consultation with the stakeholders, will this minister commit to an open, inclusive, and transparent review of the VAAA before any decisions are made?

Mr. Mar: This has always been my practice, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

English as a Second Language Programs

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ESL Council of the ATA reported in January of this year that a survey of teachers conducted in the fall of 2003 found that over half of the teachers

providing explicit ESL training and instructions do not have ESL training. The report also stated that the ratio of ESL students to certificated teachers is 121 to 1, and the ratio of ESL students to certificated teachers with ESL training is 248 to 1. This is of very great concern to students, parents, and educators. Would the Minister of Education tell the House and the people concerned if he's planning to make any further funding improvement to ESL programs?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the report of 2003, but I'd be grateful if the hon. member would send me a copy of it so I can freshen up on it.

The fact is that teachers, once they receive their certification, are eligible to teach throughout the K to 12 system. Now, there are some who have the benefit of having some enhanced training, in this case in ESL.

I think the short answer to the question about the improvements is that we've made a number of improvements to ESL programming. We have four different programs now for ESL. You have the general program, you have the enhanced program, you have the ECS program and another program which ECS-eligible children can qualify for. So we've made a number of improvements, and we'll continue to make them where they are necessary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: would the minister consider removing the five-year funding cap given that the five-year cap on ESL funding is disadvantaging the disadvantaged?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Mr. Speaker, the normal expectation is that children who are receiving ESL programming would gain sufficient proficiency in the English language within a three-year period. However, we extended that to a five-year period. I should tell you that last year the overall programming for ESL was added to through the introduction of a new program called enhanced ESL programming, and that particular program would be possibly for students who have exceptional circumstances, and it, in fact, has no cap. But, in general, there's a three-year expectation. If that doesn't work, then five years, and if it's really critical, there is an opportunity to enhance even further.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the Minister of Education consider giving the Calgary board of education an additional 2 and a half million dollars, that it is spending of its own money, to support 2,300 students who have exceeded the five-year limit and are assessed as still being in need of ESL supports?

Mr. Zwozdesky: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that when I met with the Calgary board of education, this issue was raised, and I believe they indicated to me that they were going to be experiencing an inordinately high number of foreign-born ESL students who are in need of language proficiency upgrading. That having been said, it prompted me to look into this matter a little more deeply, so we are now undertaking a complete review of ESL programming from kindergarten right through to grade 12 because what we want to ensure is that our students, regardless of their circumstance, regardless of the literacy level of their families or their siblings, have every opportunity to succeed, and language must not be a barrier to that success.

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

School Construction in Calgary

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary's Western Canada high school is one of the oldest and most respected public senior high schools in Alberta, with a long-standing reputation for academic excellence. It is also a mishmash of buildings and additions dating back to 1928, and the physical plant is so worn out that the school has had to undergo major emergency repairs at least three times in the last three years. This government's own audit ranked Western Canada high school at 953 out of a possible 1,000 points in terms of the pressing need for restoration or replacement of the school building. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: will the minister commit to providing the Calgary board of education with the funds to restore or build a new Western Canada high school in the coming fiscal year?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is absolutely correct when it comes to Western Canada high school. His description of it is probably fairly aptly put. It is the number one priority for the Calgary public school board to redo the Western Canada high school along with the Bowness school, which is another one which is high on the list. It's something that we are currently working on with Calgary public to find a way that this refurbishment of that school can be expedited. It is quite a situation in Calgary when it comes to that. Quite simply, I'm working very closely with Calgary public to ensure that this can be done.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, then, to the same minister if I may suggest a way: will he address the current inadequacies in the funding framework for new school construction and ongoing school operations and maintenance by providing school districts with a separate capital envelope for restoration or replacement of aging schools?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, we're looking at a lot of different ways that capital dollars can be given out to school boards. There certainly is some merit in having a different process to put out capital dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why does the Calgary board of education seem to find that the department of infrastructure keeps changing the rules during the life of a school board's funding applications?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, actually, they don't. What the hon. member is alluding to, I'm sure, is the Calgary public and why they have not started some of the schools that approval has been given to. Everything has been completely consistent from my department's point of view.

There have been some issues about tenders not being received. As soon as a request to go out to tender is received, it is looked at in my department, and subsequently it is provided to the particular school board to go out to tender. There are presently 16 new schools being built, or under construction, in Calgary right now – 16 under construction now in Calgary – and that's absolutely huge.

I will certainly give the hon. member this. There is a need of Western Canada high school that has been identified as their number one priority, and we are looking at how we can accommodate these requests.

First Nations Participation in Royal Visit

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, leaders of Alberta's First Nations have complained that they've been relegated to a token status when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip visit the province next week. First Nations leaders have complained that their participation has been limited to a ceremonial nature only. While happy to participate in cultural events, Alberta's First Nations leaders have been denied an audience with the Queen to discuss treaty concerns. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. What has the government done to address the concerns of native leaders who claim that they've been relegated to only a ceremonial role during the royal visit?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, I should indicate that I am not the person responsible for accepting Her Majesty's itinerary nor setting it. However, I can advise the hon. member that Prince Philip, when he attends the city of Fort McMurray, has meetings set with First Nations and Métis leaders in that jurisdiction. I don't control Her Majesty's itinerary outside.

I know that Her Majesty did make requests, for example, to be welcomed in a very aboriginal First Nations ceremony when she arrives later on today, I believe in roughly one hour and 15 minutes, in the city of Regina. So, Mr. Speaker, there is ample opportunity for the aboriginal community to participate in the events both ceremonially but also as guests of various dinners such as the Prime Minister's dinner and the dinner hosted by the government of Alberta and, certainly, at Commonwealth Stadium as well as the event at the Roundup Centre in the city of Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has the government, then, conveyed to Buckingham Palace the desire of First Nations leaders to have an audience with Her Majesty, whom they see as a guarantor of their treaty rights?

Mr. Mar: Mr. Speaker, there is, again, an itinerary that has been set by Her Majesty the Queen, that has been set many months in advance, and it would be very difficult to change that itinerary now, sir.

Mr. Eggen: So did you in fact convey the desire at least for the First Nations to have an audience with the Queen?

Mr. Mar: That would not be my responsibility, sir.

Public Land Management

Mr. Groeneveld: Mr. Speaker, there are few places considered more valued by Albertans than the magnificent eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. In fact, to some it seems that we are loving it to death. Recently a task force of four rural municipalities presented a report to the Standing Policy Committee on Energy and Sustainable Development. This task force prepared 21 recommendations for actions to implement on public land and resource management, issues such as increased and inappropriate public use and the lack of provincial management. My first question is for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Because the focus of the report

is on public land, what support can these municipalities expect in dealing with what's happening on our eastern slopes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Coutts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had the distinct opportunity to participate in that meeting, as well, along with a lot of my colleagues, and we were impressed with the task force commitment over the last two and a half years to try to find solutions to access management in the backcountry and some of the other issues that are important to the municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Sustainable Resource Development has had the task force document for a few months, and after the meeting last night we've thoroughly gone over the report and now will make it available to other departments of government. What's interesting is that many of the recommendations in the task force report fit initiatives that we are already doing in Sustainable Resource Development and trying hard to address. Some examples of that are . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Because a major portion of the problem stated by the task force referred to a rapid increase of off-highway vehicle use and abuse on the public land, how is the minister's department dealing with this issue?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, in addition to co-ordinated weed management and access management as well as monitoring and enforcement and a major respect the land public awareness and education, we believe that we have to have all stakeholders involved in those consultations. That's why we involve a broad sector of stakeholders, to make sure that access management like what happened in the Bighorn – many of the people that were involved in the stakeholder meetings are now involved in the enforcement as well. That particular access management plan is working very, very well.

We also want to take that initiative and provide the same thing to the Ghost-Waiparous area, among other areas in the province. While we have good co-operation solutions to high-use or environmentally sensitive areas, we're also working with stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, on a province-wide basis.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplement, again for the same minister: what steps is the minister's department taking to ensure public safety and protection of the environment during the upcoming long weekend in busy off-highway vehicle recreation areas like Ghost-Waiparous, which is a real hot issue at this time?

Mr. Coutts: And a very important question it is, Mr. Speaker. For 75 years we've had government staff active in monitoring and enforcement on our public lands in the Rocky Mountain areas, and we continue to do that today. I must add that today we also focus on engaging the public because we feel that they're responsible for being good stewards of the land as well. So it's an education component that we're looking for.

This year's budget reflects some of the focus of that education and that stewardship. Among other areas Ghost-Waiparous will be a hotbed of activity on this long weekend, but more importantly we

plan to have at least an additional 30 enforcement officers and personnel out there in Ghost-Waiparous helping people to have a safe, enjoyable weekend.

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

Métis Hunting Rights

Mr. Tougas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period throughout this session the Official Opposition has asked the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development a number of questions about the process involved in the creation of the final agreement that will replace the interim Métis harvesting agreement. However, the minister has repeatedly dodged questions about the timeline for completion of this agreement, leaving many groups wondering and worrying about the next step in the process. My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Given that the minister stated in question period on April 28, "If there is going to be, a final agreement or a series of agreements," is the minister suggesting that the agreement may stay in place for months or years to come?

2:20

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, in terms of the date and the time that we would be able to look at the agreement, we did sign the interim agreement so that we have until I think about this fall to look at what the outcomes will be. We would like to see what the results will be because we want to be able to bring out more information, to be able to find out the number of cases that we do have, how many possible hunting licences that we do have. We would be able to get all that information in order for us to be able to come together to determine, as I indicated in the last question I was asked, whether or not it will be a final agreement or a series of final agreements that we would look at.

Mr. Tougas: To the same minister: what did the minister mean when she said that there could be a "series of agreements"? Can you expand on that, please?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't have that information. We need to be able to get all the information in order for us to be able to determine what it is that we will have as the final result. We don't have that information. When we have that information, we will then come forward, and our caucus colleagues will be involved to determine what will happen in terms of if there is a final agreement or a series of final agreements.

Mr. Tougas: Well, given that the minister has never set a firm deadline for the new agreement to be in place, is the minister attempting to shut out conservation groups, hunting groups, and her own caucus from the negotiation process?

Ms Calahasen: Well, Mr. Speaker, not at all. I think that's just ludicrous. First of all, we have a process in this government. That process identifies that a standing policy committee will make those decisions in terms of a policy. Secondly, we will then take that through the regular process. We have been working with our colleagues on this side of the House to be able to determine what the concerns will be, and they've been hearing as well from their organizations. We also have information that will be coming from Sustainable Resource Development that we have to monitor what's going on in order for us to be able to determine what it is that we have to do. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has

been working with the various organizations that fall within his jurisdiction.

Lakeland College

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, the 2000-2003 business plan for Lakeland College addressed the requirements of the college to reverse a five-year enrolment drop of about 20 per cent. The college decided to invest its own resources in the growth of the college, and over the past few years Strathcona county has been working with Lakeland College to develop a Sherwood Park campus. Recently there were rumours that the Sherwood Park initiative has drained the college's reserves and that Lakeland College would not move forward by offering courses or creating a campus in Sherwood Park. Could the Minister of Advanced Education advise the Assembly if he's looking into the operations of Lakeland College?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, the Minister of Advanced Education is not looking into the operations of Lakeland College, but I can tell you what has happened. In fact, there are a number of rumours and innuendos in the communities from Sherwood Park east to the border with respect to what's happening with Lakeland College, a lot of concern that's come out of the communities, many concerns, even those expressed by the MLA for the Lloydminster area. In fact, people are very concerned that the college continue to provide educational opportunities in the communities of Vermilion, in the communities of Lloydminster, and throughout the whole area east of the city. So we took a careful approach to appointing a new board chair, appointed a new board chair recently, asked that board chair to work with the board to determine the financial situation of the college, to make sure that they were on firm ground financially, and then to pursue the mandate of the college prior to any large expansion plans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister advise us about the status of course offerings in Sherwood Park for the next year and if a Sherwood Park campus would fit into the ministry's plans for increasing seats for students in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, the long-term plan for the college, of course, will be developed by the board of the college but, hopefully, in the context of the system review that we're talking about in terms of what the component parts of a postsecondary education system in the province are. As we look to extending educational opportunities out past the corridor and into other parts of Alberta, we will have to be conscious of the role that's played by colleges like Lakeland College, Portage College, Northern Lakes, those colleges, but we also have to be very interested in the educational opportunities for, for example, the county of Strathcona and Sherwood Park.

The mandate in terms of where Lakeland provides courses will be determined by the board of Lakeland after it's done its review and looked at its mandate, and of course we will be looking to work with them to determine how far and how fast they expand into the Sherwood Park area and whether a Sherwood Park campus fits into that context.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lougheed: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: has he had the opportunity to consider the P3 proposal by Lakeland College for a Sherwood Park campus?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Approximately three or four years ago the county of Strathcona gave, in essence, 67 acres to Lakeland College for the siting of a college. Subsequently what has occurred is Elk Island Catholic has become very excited about this particular project.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at it. As the hon. Minister of Advanced Education stated, there are mandate issues that have to be dealt with with regard to this college. We're just in the business of building buildings, and if indeed there is a will to have a college there, we will build it. It is a good proposal that has been put forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Reforestation

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the course of the last decade over 13,000 hectares of forest north of Slave Lake have fallen to wildfires, including over 1,000 hectares of replanted cut blocks. However, the reclamation of the reforested cut blocks destroyed or damaged by the forest fires have been ignored by this government, forcing industry to bear the cost of this devastation alone. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Given that the forest industry spends millions of dollars in reforestation efforts, which can be compromised by wildfires, when will this government take responsibility for reclaiming burnt plantations on Crown land instead of passing the buck to small operators?

Mr. Coutts: Mr. Speaker, we take responsibility of that through our delegated authority called FRIAA. In addition to that, in this year's budget, which was discussed in this Assembly for a matter of two hours here Wednesday night, I believe the 4th of May, we discussed the \$1.5 million that goes into reforestation to make sure that these cut blocks on the forest fire side and on the small producer side – that \$1.5 million goes to reforestation of those areas. So that's already been looked after.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why has this ministry allowed huge swaths of burnt, replanted land north of Slave Lake to revert to grasslands, which are hostile to the coniferous seedlings and detrimental to the area's future abilities to maintain the vibrant forest industry?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, sometimes when you have a number of forest fires and you have a number of hectares that are burnt, you can't keep up with the reforestation with the dollars that are available. Sometimes there are areas where other species will take over where the forest was. FRIAA takes those into account. They do an assessment on the ground of exactly where the forest is and the kinds of species that could be reforested in those areas that are available. That assessment is done on a year-by-year basis by the delegated authority, and they do a very good job of it.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question to the same minister: given that the forest protection core business plan does not specify the government's roles and responsibilities in reclamation of burnt areas, when will this government take action and put the required strategy into place?

Mr. Coutts: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a strategy. Under forest management agreements the companies do have a responsibility to reforest the areas. They want to make sure that reforestation in their area is sustainable for years to come. In areas where a forest fire is outside their forest management, we look at FRIAA to help us make sure that reforestation is done there as well. So it's a very responsible policy that is put forward by this government and the industry and the dollars that are committed by the industry to make sure that they reforest.

Mr. Speaker, 73 million trees are planted in this province every single solitary year. This year I believe we are up to 150 million trees being planted, and the anniversaries of that are within the next couple of weeks here. So our forest companies do a very responsible job of making sure that it's sustainable for years to come.

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

2:30

Domestic Violence

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Domestic violence is a very serious problem in Alberta. In 2003 5,921 spousal abuse incidents were reported to police – that's an average of 16 per day – 3,666 charges were laid, and six people died as a result of spousal abuse. During the May 2005 fatality inquiry into the deaths of the Fekete family the RCMP was criticized for the way its members responded to information that the estranged husband was dangerous and threatening. My questions are to the Solicitor General. In the wake of the Fekete fatality inquiry what is the Solicitor General doing to ensure that the RCMP are adequately trained to address domestic violence cases?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The RCMP have been very proactive regarding this issue since the tragic incident happened two years ago. In fact, a senior executive officer of the RCMP took the lead in doing an internal review, where 91 recommendations were brought forward to the assistant commissioner of K Division, where, in fact, 30 of those recommendations have come into being already.

Mr. Speaker, following this tragic incident the ability to ensure that domestic violence training is taught to RCMP officers throughout this province has assisted the Solicitor General's office, with the office of the Minister of Children's Services as well as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, where courses are provided throughout the various detachments throughout the province. In fact, one of those courses is going to be held in Fort McMurray later this month. To date 1,800 RCMP officers have been provided domestic violence training since the passing of the Protection against Family Violence Act of 1999.

Mrs. Jablonski: To the same minister: what's the Solicitor General doing to ensure that municipal police services are adequately trained to address domestic violence cases?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Cernaiko: Well, again, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The larger municipalities such as Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat have units that are specifically dedicated to investigating domestic violence cases. In Calgary they have the domestic violence conflict unit. In Edmonton they have the family violence conflict unit. Those investigators work alongside Children's Services officers that are human service workers, who are sort of the old social service workers. They work together in going to a home. They investigate the complaint and, as well, investigate the issues regarding the family. So on one side they can investigate the criminal allegation; on the other side they can investigate and provide the support services that the family may require regarding the incident that may have happened in the home.

Mrs. Jablonski: My final question is to the Attorney General. Given that it's statistically unlikely that a person convicted of domestic violence assault will change their behaviour patterns without help and that they are likely to reoffend, are judges who convict domestic violence offenders required to sentence these offenders to treatment programs?

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

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of sentencing options which are available to the courts – peace bonds, suspended sentence, conditional sentence – all of which have conditions, which can include that the offender be sent to a mandatory treatment centre dealing with the elimination of violent behaviour. So that is the method in which that can be available.

We do have a limited number of programs in Alberta directed at this particular issue. They are located in a number of locations – Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, and so on – but they are limited. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that it is available, and the courts are in fact addressing this issue by requesting offenders to embark upon these particular programs through conditional sentencing of one form or another.

The Clerk: Members' Statements.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six hon. members to participate, but in the interim might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

Mr. Mar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This October Alberta will host a national conference and four national symposia on sport and recreation. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Bob Weller, chair of the Canadian national parks and recreation conference; Heather Cowie, chair of the Youth Development Through Recreation Services 2005 National Symposium; Hugh Hoyles, chair of the True Sport in the Community National Symposium; Cliff Lacey, chair of the Pathways and Trails National Symposium; Valerie Nicoll, chair of the conference facilities committee; and Vern Colley, vice-chair of the International Symposium on Active Leisure for Citizens with Disabilities. With Vern are members of his steering committee who are in the building today in meetings: Glenda Heale, Bev Matthiessen, Norbert Frank, and Katie Burley-Wood.

I'm also pleased to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, from the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association, providing support for the symposia, Mr. Steve Allan and Todd Reade, and here from Chrysalis, an Alberta society for people with disabilities, are Lorie Fischer and Isabelita Wheeler.

All of these individuals are steering or supporting the conference and symposia to improve the quality of life of all Albertans through recreation and parks. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Vignettes from Alberta's History

The Speaker: Hon. members, the historical vignette today refers to an event that occurred on the grounds of the Alberta Legislative Assembly five years ago today. On that day a statue of Lord Strathcona was unveiled on the Legislature Grounds in honour of the 100th anniversary of Lord Strathcona's Horse, the Royal Canadian regiment. This is an important part of our proud military tradition.

This regiment was founded in 1900 by Donald Smith, Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, to serve in the South African Boer War. Since its creation this regiment has served in both world wars, the Korean War, and various peacekeeping missions. Three members of the regiment have been awarded the Victoria Cross, and the regiment has 22 battle honours approved for emblazonment. This regiment, with its western origins, has touched upon many of the people and places that have figured prominently in Alberta's development.

Hon. members, for those of you interested in learning more about this fascinating part of our history, I'd like to note that the Provincial Museum is currently showing an exhibit entitled Hoof Prints to Tank Tracks: 100 Years of the South Alberta Light Horse, and that will be on display until September 18.

head: **Members' Statements**

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

Benefits of Immigration to Alberta

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know that the prosperity of a province or a nation is dependent on its human resources, both as producers and consumers. Our Alberta is blessed with natural resources. Those natural resources have been sitting there for millions of years. They only become Alberta's advantage when our human resources realize them. Human resources make our province prosper through innovation and creativity. To sustain such prosperity and develop it further, we need more human resources.

Indeed, every year, Mr. Speaker, tens of thousands of new Canadians make Alberta their home. They departed from their homelands to leave behind bad practices. They came here to build better lives for themselves and their families and to build a society better than where they departed from. Most of them are professionals in their lands of birth. They need a better society and system, and Alberta needs their human resources. It's a perfect partnership in building a great society.

Mr. Speaker, I have had many occasions to visit several immigrant-assisting agencies. One of their outstanding services is to help immigrant professionals to integrate quickly into the Alberta workforce. I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to the service providers and the companies that sponsored the new Canadians into their workplaces by providing their first work experience in Canada. Indeed, the first work experience in Canada is vital to new immigrants.

I urge our government to create additional short-term internship

positions within the government for qualified immigrants who seek work experience for the first time in Canada. This will encourage and challenge private corporations and the federal government to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

2:40

Marie Geddes

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to acknowledge a woman who took a small political action which had large consequences. Marie Geddes died yesterday in Camrose. To me she represented all the residents and family members of residents in long-term care who took steps to focus attention on what was really happening. Marie talked in a matter-of-fact way about wanting more than one bath a week, about the quality of food, about the staff just not having the time to get everything done.

Together with the Auditor General's report Marie's story delivered a knockout punch to any idea that everything was great in long-term care. Marie Geddes made it personal and political, and a lot of people had a better understanding of what is wrong in long-term care because of her courage. What she did to get herself into a position where she could get media attention and could get people to listen to her was to go on a hunger strike. Eighty-six years old, a diabetic, and she went on a hunger strike. Pretty courageous and pretty scary.

If we get any action from the government in long-term care, we need to credit Marie Geddes and all the Marie Geddeses who speak out, all the residents and their families and the advocacy groups and even people totally unconnected. I have a constituent who heard Marie's story on the radio, and this constituent went out and organized a petition and within a few weeks had over 400 signatures on it. I'll table that petition later today.

So thanks again, Marie. Thanks for your courageous advocacy, for your simple but powerful descriptions on what is going on in long-term care. You helped a lot.

Thank you.

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

World No Tobacco Day

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission I am pleased to inform the hon. members that AADAC will be hosting a provincial celebration to mark World No Tobacco Day, and that's on May 30 at the Coast Terrace Inn in Edmonton.

It's a very significant date, Mr. Speaker. Since 1988 the World Health Organization has designated World No Tobacco Day as an annual global event to call world-wide attention to the impact of tobacco use on public health. Here in Alberta the World No Tobacco Day provincial celebration recognizes the efforts of our community partners and salutes their commitment to tobacco reduction in our province. This year AADAC is pleased to sponsor the event with partners Health Canada, the Alberta Lung Association, and the Canadian Cancer Society.

The event features presentations of the Barb Tarbox awards of excellence and youth scholarship fund. As my colleagues may be aware, Mr. Speaker, after being diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, Barb Tarbox dedicated the remainder of her life to talking to young people about the dangers of smoking. After her death two years ago at the age of 42 AADAC established the awards in Barb's honour to recognize Alberta businesses, nonprofit groups, and individuals who have made significant impacts in the area of tobacco prevention,

cessation, and reduction as well as protection from second-hand smoke. In addition, a \$2,500 youth scholarship fund is awarded to a young person under the age of 18 who has made a positive contribution to tobacco reduction in their community.

As the leader of the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy AADAC could not have achieved the results it has without the community involvement of concerned individuals, agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. I'm proud to inform our hon. members that the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy is helping to significantly reduce tobacco use in the province, and the results are impressive, Mr. Speaker. The number of Albertans over the age of 15 who smoke has dropped from 25 per cent in 2001-2002 to 20 per cent in 2003-2004. That's a hundred thousand fewer smokers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your support of World No Tobacco Day.

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

Camrose Kodiaks Hockey Team

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to congratulate the Camrose Kodiaks upon winning the silver medal at the Royal Bank Cup, the Canadian junior A hockey championship. The home team Weyburn Red Wings won the gold in a close 3 to 2 victory in the final game. The game was nationally televised on TSN following the world championship final game where Canada also won a silver medal in Vienna.

All season long the Kodiaks have performed excellently. In reaching the Royal Bank championship, they not only won the Alberta junior A championship but went on to win the Alberta/B.C. junior A championship, the Doyle Cup. This accomplishment was possible thanks to the excellent leadership from coaches Boris Rybalka, Doug Fleck, and Miles Walsh, who provided the guidance and support needed throughout the season to reach these accomplishments in postseason play. Captain Travis Friedley was named MVP and best defenceman in the Canadian championships, and Mason Raymond was named best forward and was the tournament's leading scorer. Forward Jason Roberts was named player of the final game for the Kodiaks.

The Kodiaks have won the Alberta junior championship three years of the eight that they have been part of the Alberta junior league. This is their second silver medal win at the Royal Bank Cup, and although they came close to winning the gold medal this year, the Kodiaks won the gold at the Royal Bank Cup in 2001.

Since their inception in 1997 the Kodiaks have been embraced by the community as indicated by the sellout crowds in the playoffs. The players have had a positive influence on younger minor hockey players of the area, and they have demonstrated that hard work and a high level of skill and discipline pay off in a young player's dream to succeed and excel.

Tonight I will be attending a city of Camrose welcome-home rally. This event will reflect the intense community support for the Kodiaks and demonstrate the importance of this level of hockey in the Camrose area.

In a year without NHL hockey the Kodiaks and other amateur teams have shown that the pure sport of hockey is alive and well and enjoyed by fans across Alberta and Canada. Thank you.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of this month you advised the Assembly that May is Cystic Fibrosis Month. Cystic fibrosis, or CF, is the most common fatal genetic disease affecting young people in Alberta. It affects mainly the lungs and the

digestive system, and lung disease represents the biggest single threat to the lives of children and adults who have CF.

Thanks to advances in research and treatment, young persons with CF are living longer and healthier lives. In the 1960s most children with CF were not expected to live long enough to reach kindergarten. Today half of all Canadians with CF are expected to live to 37 years and beyond.

Recently the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation held its annual general meeting and conference in Edmonton. The foundation, with more than 50 volunteer chapters, is a Canada-wide health charity which funds care and cystic fibrosis research. I had the pleasure of attending the foundation's gala awards dinner on Friday, April 29, 2005, and met some of the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation award winners.

In keeping with the conference theme, Volunteers: Our Most Precious Resource, the delegates from across Canada honoured a number of outstanding volunteers for their selfless dedication to the CF cause. Many of those honoured were residents of Alberta. The Breath of Life award was received by Lorraine Johnson, of Edmonton; Jordan Milne, a Calgary law student; and the McWhirter family, of Calgary. Chris Small, of Edmonton, received the Céline award. The Earl Grey Golf Club from Calgary, Gloria Both of Red Deer, and Rob Sokil from Edmonton received the Julia award.

Ron Moore, of Edmonton, received the Summerhayes award. Very sadly, Ron Moore has now succumbed to the deadly disease. He was 48 years old and a truly remarkable individual, extremely dedicated to the CF cause, and an accomplished athlete.

Researchers funded by the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation discovered the gene responsible for cystic fibrosis in 1989. Canadians are marking CF Awareness Month. Let's congratulate the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation for their good work.

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

Prevention of Youth Violence

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Alberta is supposed to be one of the safest places in one of the safest countries on earth. Many people come to Canada to enjoy its safety and freedom from the violence they may have feared in their first country. But just look at the news. Every day we get news of more violence: more stabbings, more car theft, and more murders. So often it is our young people. What is happening on our streets, and why?

Crystal meth and other drugs are a big part of the problem. This government is moving slowly, but I'm glad that this Legislature has begun to address crystal meth. Government must focus on drug abuse and find real ways to get kids off drugs and, therefore, to stop the crime and violence we see.

One of the best ways to keep kids out of trouble is to keep them busy. Kids learn teamwork, learn how to set and reach goals, stay fit, gain recognition and confidence by being involved in sports or dance or kung fu or whatever. Cost is a problem for many, many families. I hear the cost complaint often. But the cost of the violence and the loss of the sense of safety and security is much, much worse. Another solution is to increase the number of police officers.

We must provide whatever support we can so that kids can get into good things. We want them off the streets and out of trouble. We must work to win the fight, and we must provide tax credits for kids' recreation or whatever to attack this.

Thank you very much.

head: 2:50

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a petition signed by 321 Albertans who are eager to see potentially life-saving improvements to highways in northern Alberta, particularly highway 63. With today's tabling the total signatures on this petition so far is 4,699.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to present a petition from a number of good Albertans, almost all from the city of Edmonton, and it reads:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to prohibit the importation of temporary foreign workers to work on the construction and/or maintenance of oil sands facilities and/or pipelines until the following groups have been accessed and/or trained: Unemployed Albertans and Canadians; Aboriginals; unemployed youth under 25; under-employed landed immigrants; and displaced farmers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today the required number of copies of responses to written questions and motions for returns raised during the First Session of the 26th Legislature involving the Department of Advanced Education. This would be written questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 20, 21, 25, 26, and 27 and motions for returns 2, 3, and 31. Should members have additional concerns or observations or questions relating to any of the matters out of those written questions or other matters, I would invite them to attend at my office or raise them with me.

I've tabled the copies of the binder with the Clerk's office rather than bringing them all in today, the copies of that. Just out of interest's sake, Mr. Speaker, providing answers to these questions: particularly, Motion for a Return 3 took 64 hours of government staff work and in total to answer all these questions, 96 hours of government staff work.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and table the appropriate number of copies of the 2002-2003 children's advocate annual report. The work of the advocate is extremely important to make sure that children and youth receiving services have an advocate to assist them.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table copies of a document outlining the action Children's Services has already taken to address the issues in this report. All of the issues have been addressed through various ministry programs, services, or legislation.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table requisite copies of supplementary information to questions that were asked during the April 20 Committee of Supply review of the Ministry of Energy's business plan and estimates.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Dunford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the

required number of copies of the 2003-2004 Alberta Economic Development Authority activity report entitled Strategies for a New Era.

Thank you.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation dated May 5, 2005, to myself. This letter indicates that the Edmonton public school board has requested "15 portables at 15 schools, including one for Kenilworth school."

My second tabling is a document that was provided through an access to information request from the Edmonton public school board. It indicates the constituencies where the cluster studies would be conducted to close Edmonton public schools. Cluster study A is in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, cluster B is in Edmonton-Calder, and cluster C is in Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The third tabling I have this afternoon is also a document that was received through access to information. It indicates, contrary to what the public board had stated, that there was a lease signed at Terrace Heights school between Edmonton school district No. 7 and Alberta Online Consortium Association, and this lease is dated March 24, 2005.

Thank you.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition that was put together by my constituent, Norma Nozick. The 418 people signing were asking to urge the government of Alberta to

increase staff to our nursing homes. Their residents, citizens of our wealthy province should not be punished for their crime of being fragile, infirm and dependent. They have earned the right to receive adequate, respectful care, which an increase in support would give them.

We strongly implore the government to act immediately.

The petition was not in order to be presented as a petition, so I am presenting it as a tabling.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. I am tabling an additional nine e-mails regarding the fate of the Simon Fraser junior high band program that I received from Calgary-Varsity constituents who argue that the loss of an implicit music program within our school system affects the wider circle of appreciation, exposure, and involvement in fine arts within our province.

The second set of tablings is as follows. I am tabling the required copies of last Sunday's Alberta College of Art and Design's 2005 convocation ceremony, at which artist, author, journalist, and keynote speaker Richard Rhodes reinforced the value of an arts degree, stating: no one else on the job will recognize as many shades of blue or see as far or recognize when the process has gone flat and there is a need to start over again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present five copies each of five letters from a pile of about a couple of thousand, one of the piles of letters I've got, from good Albertans decrying the use of temporary foreign workers and on the need to train young people in our own province.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter from Jacques Blanchard, from Calgary, who would like to ask the Premier to define the Alberta advantage and explain how the so-called advantage applies to overworked nurses, university students, who pay outrageous tuition fees, everyone who has felt the crunch due to bungled deregulation, and all the other groups who have fallen behind under the Premier's watch.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Clerk proceeds, I'd just like to advise hon. members that this afternoon all hon. members will be receiving correspondence from me which will partially outline the procedure for events in this Assembly next Tuesday with the arrival of Her Majesty the Queen, plus there's also a document which deals with some protocol questions. A fairly large number of members has contacted my office in recent days wanting to know some of the protocol things, particularly for the spouses of the members.

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. Cardinal, Minister of Human Resources and Employment, responses to questions raised by Members of the Legislative Assembly on April 28, 2005, the Department of Human Resources and Employment 2005-06 Committee of Supply debate. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Stevens, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, responses to questions raised by Members of the Legislative Assembly on May 3, 2005, the Department of Justice and Attorney General 2005-06 Committee of Supply debate.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on a purported point of order.

Point of Order Citing Documents

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on a point of order, and I will indicate that the citation is *Beauchesne's 495*: documents cited. Today the minister of seniors referred to an appraisal that was done on a parcel of land that has involved us in some questions in the last few days in this Assembly. She also referred to it yesterday, and I do have the *Hansard* for that. She said that an independent appraiser was hired to assess the value of the land. "The value of the land was appraised at between \$15,000 and \$40,000, and that was depending on how soon housing could be developed in the area." She went on to say, "Given that, the accusation about this being a private, cozy deal is completely untrue."

3:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, in *Beauchesne's 495* it says:

- (1) A Minister is not at liberty to read or quote from a despatch or other state paper not before the House without being prepared to lay it on the Table.

(2) It has been admitted that a document which has been cited ought to be laid upon the Table of the House, if it can be done without injury to the public interest.

(7) When a letter, even though it may have been written originally as a private letter, becomes part of a record of a department, it becomes a public document, and if quoted by a Minister in debate, must be tabled on request.

Mr. Speaker, I am requesting that the minister be asked to table the documents which she cited, which includes specifically the appraisal on this parcel of land. Also, the agreement for sale was referenced.

I just want to indicate that there is an exception allowed if there would be an “injury to the public interest,” and I would argue most strongly that there’s no way that an appraisal can fit that description since an appraisal is done independently by a professional and is used as a document to establish the value of land and does not comprise in itself the argument or the arrangement or agreement or contract in any way between the government or the seniors’ housing and any private developer but is actually something that is quite objective, or should be objective, and independent.

I would also argue that the public interest would be best served if the agreement for sale was also tabled by the minister since there are many questions about this land deal, and there’s widespread concern in the development and real estate communities in Fort McMurray about what happened with this deal. So I think it makes a good argument that the public interest would be served by the tabling of the agreement for sale as well.

Mr. Speaker, given that the last day of the session may well be tomorrow, I think this issue has some urgency, and I would request, on a point of order, a ruling to the effect that the minister should table both the agreement for sale and the appraisal of this parcel of land prior to this session adjourning tomorrow.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is mixing up a number of different things here. He’s mixing up the provisions of our rules which allow for motions for returns to ask the House to require the return of a document. He’s mixing up Standing Order 30 for an emergency debate on a matter of urgent and pressing necessity, and he’s doing it under the guise of asking for a document to be tabled because it was cited.

Well, Mr. Speaker, 495 says that the “Minister is not at liberty to read or quote from.” I read the *Hansard* from yesterday. I certainly listened to the answers from the questions today. There was no reading or quoting from any document. The minister simply referred to the fact that there was an appraisal and, as I recall it – and I can refresh my memory – indicated that the value of the land was appraised between \$15,000 and \$40,000, and that was depending on how soon . . .

Mr. Martin: That’s quoting.

Mr. Hancock: That’s not quoting at all. That’s simply indicating a piece of information in response to a question. If that is quoting or if that is citing a document, then virtually every answer in this House would have to be followed up by the tabling of a myriad of documents from which that information might have been taken or concluded.

All that’s really happened here under this point of order, Mr. Speaker, is that the hon. member wanted one more chance to get his point on the table with respect to the questions raised. This is not a document that’s cited under 495. It doesn’t follow under either

495(1) or 495(5), which says, “To be cited, a document must be quoted or specifically used to influence debate.” Question period, as you’ve said from time to time, is not debate.

Clearly, what’s happened is that the minister has indicated in answer to the question that the sale was done under the law in place, which allowed it to be done based on appraisal. She’s indicated that there was an appraisal done, and she’s indicated that that’s where the evaluation was taken from. But there’s no citing of the appraisal, quoting of the appraisal, or in any way reading from the appraisal or in any way referring to a document which would require the tabling of the document in the Legislature under that standing order.

Certainly, the hon. member could ask for the document under Written Questions or Motions for Returns or could simply write a letter asking for the document, in which case the normal process of review would be done to ensure that there were no issues with respect to freedom of information and protection of privacy concerns or other concerns.

One of the things, Mr. Speaker, that we have to be more and more careful about in this House, unfortunately – and I say “unfortunately” because I think sometimes it’s all too constraining. The rules with respect to the protection of privacy are very clear. Codification . . . [interjection] Members of the opposition often want codification. Well, under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act there is codification.

So, yes, an appraisal; yes, any other document. Before it can be released publicly, absolutely any document that somebody asks for we have an obligation to review to see whether by releasing the document there would be any FOIP issues or any violation of law. That’s certainly true in this case, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others who wish to participate on this point?

Well, this was certainly not the point of order that the chair anticipated. He prepared himself to do all kinds of research for the last hour with respect to 14 different other variations of that but is quite sidelined with respect to that one. Quite clearly, *Beauchesne* 495(3), “A public document referred to but not cited or quoted by a Minister need not be tabled.” The chair did review the *Hansard* of yesterday and today and could not concur that this is a point of order.

head:

Orders of the Day

head:

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 42

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005

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

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to move for second reading Bill 42, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005.

As a matter of the tradition of this Assembly a miscellaneous statutes amendment act is a piece of legislation that is noncontentious. It is something that has been reviewed with all opposition parties so goes forward with the understanding that the matters that are contained within are not contentious.

I thought I might just mention the various pieces of legislation that are in fact impacted in some fashion by the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005. They are the Alberta Housing Act, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Civil Enforcement

Act, the Employment Standards Code, the Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2003, the Government Organization Act, the Land Titles Act, the Mines and Minerals Act, the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Recognition Act, the School Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 42 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
 Third Reading
 Bill 14
 Student Financial Assistance Amendment Act, 2005

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 14, the Student Financial Assistance Amendment Act, 2005, for third reading.

We had it in committee last night, and there was a query from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview concerning the issue of a lifetime maximum. So I'll just briefly repeat what I said, I think, when I introduced this for second reading, and that is: this act is being brought forward simply to make sure that there's clarity in terms of the existing application of the rules. This is the way the rules have been applied, but there has been some question through the audit process, as I understand it, as to whether the act is clear enough in those areas. So this act simply does that.

I would indicate to the House that we are, as I said in question period earlier today, doing a complete review. I expect that the issues that were raised – and, quite frankly, I agree with you, hon. member, with respect to the concern about lifetime limits and the ability of lifelong learning and people coming back into the system. I raised that query, actually, when this came forward as a proposed act, but I was satisfied that we should make those changes in the context of the review, and for now it is entirely appropriate to make sure that the language of the act is clear and the application of the policy that's currently in place conforms with the act.

So that's the purpose for this bill. I hope that we will be back in the not too distant future debating the broader question of student loan assistance and financial aid and affordability for students.

3:10

Mr. Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I wish to finish the debate for the purpose of clarifying amending aspects of the bill. Thus, I move closing of the debate.

Ms Blakeman: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

Bill 22
Animal Protection Amendment Act, 2005

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

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 22, the Animal Protection Amendment Act, 2005.

This is an important bill that updates the existing legislation to reflect the expectations of Albertans when it comes to animal care and protection. I just want to once again thank the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and his staff for allowing

me to carry this bill, and I appreciate the support and excellent questions from members of the House.

With that, I'd now move third reading of Bill 22. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Essentially, Bill 22, the Animal Protection Amendment Act, was to give more power to peace officers to take animals into custody before they become distressed and also to provide more clarity on the care of animals and more responsibility to the owner. As the sponsoring member did indicate, there were a number of questions raised and answers supplied. The Official Opposition did consult with stakeholders, particularly the Alberta SPCA, and they were in support of what was being proposed here. We also listened to others that contacted us about this bill and raised their issues during debate.

The final point I wanted to make was that in many ways this act was too long in coming. We needed this protection for animals a long time ago. The Official Opposition is pleased to see that it is now in place and has been strengthened, and we are happy to support this bill in third reading.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My only concern is that we extend to wild animals the same kind of protected rights that we've extended in this wonderful bill to domesticated animals. I would like to see the same sort of protection extended to grizzly bears, for example, and woodland caribou.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

Bill 35
Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2005

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Nose Hill.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 35, the Employment Pension Plans Amendment Act, 2005.

I would also like to thank the hon. members of the opposition parties for their support of this legislation throughout the process.

As I stated when I was introducing this bill, this is a very important piece of legislation. I'm pleased to sponsor this bill because, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre stated in Committee of the Whole debate, it addresses something that is tremendously meaningful to a lot of people: their pension plan.

The superintendent of pensions under these amendments will have more effective means of ensuring that private-sector pension plans are being properly funded. Bill 35 also strengthens his enforcement powers if problems arise. Bill 35 also provides plan members with better access to information and provides more transparency so that they can see for themselves the financial status of their plan. They will have access to the audited financial statements, any management report that the superintendent of pensions has delivered following a plan examination, and they will have advance notification

tion of any proposed amendment to a plan that would adversely affect them. Mr. Speaker, these changes put plan members in a better position to monitor their pensions before they actually need them.

Again I thank all members for supporting this piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I do now move that the bill be read a third time and does pass.

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to lead off debate for the Official Opposition on Bill 35, the pension amendment act. As I've indicated previously, this bill appears to accomplish a lot of good things for Albertans who have investments in pensions.

I think it's been mentioned several times that, in fact, for many Albertans the pension that they hold may well be one of their single largest investments, so anything that we can do to protect that investment on behalf of those Albertans, anything we can do to ensure that they have access to better information and are aware of what changes might be taking place in those pensions is a good thing and something I support, and I have recommended to my colleagues that we support it as well.

Certainly, I would like to once again thank the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill for the tremendous effort he made in terms of answering the questions that I had raised personally during second reading of this bill. It was very much appreciated to have that information come back in the fashion that it did.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would recommend to my colleagues and all members of this House that we support this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: Shall I call the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a third time]

Bill 38

Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2005

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

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move third reading of Bill 38.

Bill 38 will update the Pharmacy and Drug Act to reflect current pharmacy practice and to clarify regulations requirements for pharmacies and drugs in Alberta. As well, changes proposed in this bill will allow the Alberta College of Pharmacists to set standards and regulations for categories of pharmacy services.

I just wanted to add that I would like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. I thought his comments in committee were very good and want him to know how much I also value pharmacists and how important I think the work that they do is.

At this time I'd like to move third reading of Bill 38.

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

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in third reading to Bill 38, the Pharmacy and Drug Amendment Act, 2005. The sponsoring member briefly touched on the purposes of the bill. I'll expand on that a bit.

The bill does change the definition of prescription in order to

allow pharmacists to work with doctors and patients to tailor drug therapy. It broadens the licence categories to include facilities such as compounding and what are called repackaging centres. It creates an appeal or review process if a pharmacy is refused a licence. It does register drug wholesalers. It clarifies the definitions and other minor revisions or additions to definitions to ensure consistency with the Health Professions Act.

Mr. Speaker, there was nothing that troubled the Official Opposition greatly in this bill. Essentially, it's a number of needed and, in fact, recommended changes that will better acknowledge the place that pharmacists and pharmacies have in our health system.

There was an amendment brought forward yesterday that further clarified concerns that I had put on the record around institutional pharmacies and that it be clear that these are to be only pharmacies operating in what we would call Crown institutions. I was concerned that there be a chance that privately run facilities with a pharmacy would then be captured under that definition. That's now been clarified, so thank you to the government for recognizing that gap and for, in fact, closing it.

3:20

We have checked with all of the stakeholders, and they are happy to support this bill in the state that it is now in. We also support this because it does adhere with our policy position 10 that came out in our health policy, and that is around recognizing how we manage our health care workforce, reducing doctors' roles in care provision where someone else can actually do it, in this case pharmacists, so reducing that role as gatekeeper, and gathering better data to plan for the future.

This was I think a step forward, and at this point I am happy to support third reading. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: Should I call the question?

[Motion carried; Bill 38 read a third time]

Bill 39

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2005

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead on behalf of.

Mr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to move Bill 39 for third reading, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2005, on behalf of the Member for Calgary-North Hill.

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

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The intention of this bill is to save lives. As the critic for Infrastructure and Transportation and representative of the Alberta Liberal opposition I fully support this bill. Hopefully, this fall members of the government will reconsider their opposition to banning the use of hand-held cellphones while driving, which if enacted would also save lives.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Speaker: The question's been called.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a third time]

Bill 36
Police Amendment Act, 2005

The Speaker: The hon. Solicitor General.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 36, the Police Amendment Act, 2005, for third reading.

These proposed amendments build on an existing police oversight mechanism with many areas being clarified and strengthened. The amendments ensure that every community has either a civilian police commission or police committee to whom the chief of police is accountable for the handling of complaints.

The amendments strengthen the role of the commission considerably. The chair of the commission under the amendments can at their discretion request another police agency anywhere in the country to investigate any complaint against a police officer. The MLA Policing Review Committee recommendations state that "it is most appropriate that the chief of police be responsible for the investigation of routine complaints." While this may be true, these amendments go farther and allow for the chair of the commission to request an outside police agency to investigate what might be considered a routine complaint if it would be in the public interest.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the amendments of the responsibilities of the director of law enforcement have been significantly increased. The director of law enforcement will ensure that commissions and committees have the training that will provide them with the knowledge and skills to perform their duties more effectively. The director of law enforcement will also monitor complaints, establish standards and audit practices to ensure that standards are met.

Finally, at the provincial level we are enhancing the role of the Solicitor General to allow the minister to require an external investigation even if the commission chair had decided against such a course of action. The minister can also appoint a civilian monitor or review person or team to oversee an investigation in cases where provincial intervention is needed.

Also, Mr. Speaker, when any complaint has been dealt with and the complainant is not satisfied, they can appeal to the Alberta Law Enforcement Review Board, which is a civilian body with considerable powers. We do not need to enhance the powers of the Law Enforcement Review Board, but we can enhance their role through policy and increased resources. In addition to its most common role of an appeal body, the board also has the power on its own to conduct inquiries respecting complaints. Further, at the request of the minister the LERB can inquire into any matter respecting policing, and that is as it should be.

Mr. Speaker, I believe I've highlighted the key points of this bill. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the hon. members from the Liberal opposition for the debate that we've had as well as thank our department staff for their hard work in drafting this bill as well as the stakeholders for their invaluable input over the last few years on this very important issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. B. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to speak on third reading of Bill 36. I congratulate the Solicitor General on presenting this bill because I think it is a substantive bill. The Solicitor General has mentioned I think previously that all legislation is in process of evolving, and certainly this is a step in the right direction, beyond where we've been before. Our only reservation is that it hasn't evolved enough to where we want it to be.

Bill 36 provides guidelines for the establishment of policing

committees and police commissions, and that's all very important. It also ensures a high level of competence in terms of the training of members of police commissions and police committees through a director of law enforcement whose responsibility it is to develop crime prevention and restorative justice programs and to train personnel and to ensure high standards for police committees and commissions, and that's really important.

It also provides guidelines for the designation of a public complaints director to receive routine complaints against police officers, who would refer them to the chief of police, and then the chief of police may request the commission chair to bring in another police service to investigate, and all that's really important.

The one area where we have reservations is in the way that this amendment act suggests how serious incidents and complaints should be handled. When the minister is notified by a chief of police about a serious complaint, the minister may – it doesn't say that he must – do one or more of the following. He may request "another police service to provide a police officer" to investigate or he may request "another police service to conduct an investigation" or he may "appoint one or more members of the public as overseers to observe" and to monitor the process of the investigation carried out by a police service.

Now, in our view this does not go far enough, and during committee we suggested an amendment to the section, which was defeated. We think that this part of the act does not satisfy it. We're talking about the effect of this bill on the public. This bill does not go far enough in dealing with the public desire for actual independence and impartiality on the part of investigation.

We've got a lot of cases where the public is expressing its lack of confidence in the abilities of police to investigate themselves, so there's a desire for something more. There's a desire to have an independent and impartial investigative process and also a process that has the appearance of impartiality and objectivity. That's very, very important.

Of course, there are lots of models in other jurisdictions across Canada and the United States, and we made reference to the Ontario model of the Special Investigations Unit, which was established some years ago to deal with serious cases. It's interesting. Their motto, as I mentioned in our previous debate, is Independent Investigations, Community Confidence, and that's exactly why we in the Liberal opposition are opposing this bill, because we don't think in its effect it's ensuring public confidence. Independent Investigations, Community Confidence: that's what we need.

In the different models of civilian oversight of the police, of course, there are two extremes. There's the in-house model where police officers receive a complaint and they investigate it themselves, so it's police investigating police. That's the in-house model. The other extreme is the Ontario example, the fully independent model, where civilians both investigate and adjudicate the complaint. What we brought as an amendment was a model in between. We don't think that what is suggested by the bill goes much beyond the in-house model. Sure, you have a couple of people from the public who maybe could be appointed to ensure the integrity of the process. So they oversee the process, but they are not engaged in the investigation itself, even though a person could be a retired judge, retired policeman, and so on, and have the abilities to carry out investigations.

3:30

So this is just a variation, I think, of the in-house model, and what we need is a fully independent model. I'm looking forward to the day when we can evolve a little further down the road to have an amendment to the Police Act so that we can have a fully independ-

ent, impartial, objective, civilian oversight process to hear serious complaints about the police service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. I've made comments before on this, but it seems that there was a change from the minister. I notice that three years ago, when the minister was a backbencher, I think he advocated for an independent police secretariat as part of the MLA Policing Review Committee's proposal for better civilian oversight of police. Now that he's the minister in charge of policing and the Solicitor General, although, admittedly, I suppose it's a step in the right direction, the minister is proposing much more modest measures to deal with the problems of police investigating themselves.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I do not think that it serves the police well if there is the cynicism that police are investigating themselves, especially in the Edmonton area after the infamous Overtime bar symptom of the problems created when police operate without accountability to the community. I think that brought it front and centre. As a result of that, I believe that we need at least a more transparent process, that it's not the police investigating the police.

Now, this bill takes us in some direction to cover this, but it doesn't go the way I think it would have if what the minister was proposing as a backbench MLA – I think it can be best described as minor tinkering rather than significant change. Admittedly, Mr. Speaker, it does open the door slightly to an independent investigation of serious police wrongdoing, but again, as mentioned by the previous speaker, this would be entirely at the discretion of the Solicitor General. There's no agency being established to conduct such investigations. It seems to me, then, that as a result of that, even though the minister theoretically has a right, the status quo of the police investigating the police will continue to prevail in this province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, I don't think that serves the public well, and I don't think it serves the police well when that perception is out there. Whether they come back with the right decision, if it's the police investigating themselves and they come back and say that there was nothing wrong, maybe they're right – probably in most cases they were – but there's always that perception out there that if it had been an independent investigation, there might have been a different result.

That's why I say, Mr. Speaker, that I don't think police investigating police – there at least should probably be police on it but an independent commission looking into it. The previous member mentioned Ontario. Whether you have to go, as he said, that far or not, I don't know. But it seems, in the discussions that we've had, to be working relatively well there, and I think the police would argue that they're perhaps being well served.

So I don't understand why we can't take the final step here, Mr. Speaker, as when the minister was an MLA advocating an independent commission. Now that he's the Solicitor General, we're going to have more power in the Solicitor General's department. The only other point I would like to make – and I know that at this stage in third reading this is probably not going to change, but I would hope that the minister would reconsider and go back to his MLA days and look at what he was advocating at that particular time. I think that made the most sense.

The other point – and I've heard the minister talk about this in the media – that I think is a bit of a problem is the one-year time limit being imposed on making complaints against the police. I know that the minister has said that in a couple other provinces – he can correct

me if I'm wrong: I think he mentioned New Brunswick, and I'm not sure of the other province – they had six months or three months or something and that by comparison Alberta was better off with a year. Well, I don't think we should be comparing ourselves in that regard, Mr. Speaker. I think limiting periods are problematic because people have intimidated their victims so much sometimes that they don't report the crime for many years. Certainly, a one-year time limit I don't think is adequate.

So the best I can say about the bill, Mr. Speaker, is that it's better than what was there before, but certainly I don't think that as an MLA on the MLA review committee the member would have accepted this. As I say, this is tinkering rather than really doing something about the problem, and I think the minister could do better. Hopefully, next year he will come back with a different bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available should anyone wish to participate.

If not, then I'll call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm glad of the opportunity to speak in third reading to Bill 36, the Police Amendment Act, 2005. Frankly, I'm glad that my colleague who is the Official Opposition critic for the Solicitor General spoke before me because he's kinder than I am, and it was probably nice to start out that way. To me, this bill has utterly failed in what we needed it to do. I find it meek, I find it tentative, and I find that it polishes up the status quo. It did not do what we the people needed it to do.

We allow policing by consent. We agree as a population that we will allow police officers to move among us and uphold the laws that we want, and we agree that these people will be given the special powers to do that. When we as the public start to develop suspicions or have concerns about the police, it's very, very important that we are reassured that there are strong and vigorous processes in place.

There have been a number of examples in Calgary and Edmonton and elsewhere that are causing a credibility crisis, an integrity crisis here. I was hoping that we would see the leadership from the government that stepped forward and said: "We understand that, and we're going to deal with this. We will do what needs to be done to reassure the public." What that really was about, Mr. Speaker, was making sure that that transparency, that civilian oversight, that accountability was put into place and everybody could see it so that, if I may paraphrase, not only was justice done but seen to be done. It's what some of the others have commented on, that not only is there actual transparency but that there's the appearance of that.

It has to do with who gets to make those decisions and whether they are making those decisions in public or behind closed doors. That's why I say that all we got here was the status quo polished up a bit because, ultimately, the big changes that we needed are not in this act and are not provided for us. Could the Overtime incident happen again, and would the outcome be any different with what we have in this legislation? The answer is no.

Where they had the opportunity to turn shalls into mays, they didn't do it. My colleague brought forward amendments that gave them a second chance to do that. They wouldn't do it. So it is weak, it is tentative, it is meek. It did not provide what we needed it to do.

Neither does it give police officers a fair shake, Mr. Speaker. I think all of us in here appreciate the work that police officers do. We have comments from some of my colleagues with their concerns over rising crime in their communities and how valued officers are. All of us mourned the deaths of the four RCMP officers that happened a few months ago. I don't think there's any question that everyone here values what police officers do.

3:40

From my point of view as a previous critic in this particular area, what I saw happening was that even when an officer was involved in something and they did get cleared, nobody ever believed them. They didn't get credit for that because they had been cleared by a process that the public didn't trust. So even if that officer should have walked away with his/her head up high and absolutely any blemish taken right off their record, they couldn't do that because there was always a sneaking suspicion, there was always a wonder about what really happened and who really was there and what really was said.

Because it was a behind-closed-doors, secretive, by-appointment-only kind of process and officers investigating themselves so there was always a question of whether the brotherhood was assisting or aiding or abetting each other, it did not help those officers to be able to have the cleared record that they deserved, and that was very frustrating for me. I have a number of police officers that are constituents, and that was my concern, that when they were cleared, they were really cleared, and there was no question. There would be no lingering doubt here. They would be absolved as was appropriate. On the other hand, if they weren't, if they had done something, then that would be clear too, and it would be out there and above board.

This legislation did not give us any of what we the public, we the people, needed to be reassured of those decisions. It's not independent. There's fiddling around, well, maybe they could do this, and they could bring in someone else, and they could send it to an outside source but none of the strong actions and leadership that I was really hoping to see, especially since we've spent so much darn time on this, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, that first Police Act review was in 2000, I think. Yeah, October 2000; there you go. Then they reported with that really awful draft in 2002. Then the final report was released in July of 2002. Then there was a second version of it in 2003.

I mean, there were all kinds of wild and wacky things that were being thought of in there. I think the committee was genuinely trying to envision a future and to really see what all kinds of possibilities were out there, so maybe that's what gave it that sort of air of the sublime. But in the end the final report that came through had gotten rid of some of the things like the aerial space drones to spy on the sheep in the pasture and that sort of thing.

One of the areas that continues to cause me some questions – and I'm not having those satisfied by the minister – is around the deputy constables and around the special constables. Who does what role, and how much do they do, and are they going to be armed and with what? How much training do they get for using that weaponry? All of those things have yet to be sorted out, Mr. Speaker.

As I say, this is 2005. We started down this road in 2000. I would have expected that over those five years some of those questions should have been answered. So I'm also noting that failure in my discussion over the anticipated effects of this bill.

So I will not support this bill, and I didn't at any stage that I was able to vote on it. It will be a long time before we get another shot at this. If I knew that it was going to come back next year and we could take this a step further or the many steps further that I was hoping to see, I'd maybe be a bit more willing to go: well, incrementally, okay. But my experience has been that once legislation like this goes by, it'll be five or 10 years before we see it back in here because it's sort of off the burner now, and nobody's too excited about it, and well, you know, just give it some time to settle in and shake down and we'll see what happens with it. It takes a long time before the rumblings from the population bring it back up onto the stovetop, if you want to put it that way, so that it gets another chance at an amendment. So we're stuck with this.

I think that in this day and age, especially when we look at issues around the databases that the police have access to and the information that they hold on us – you know, most officers are very conscientious individuals. They're working very hard to uphold the law that they're given. It's frustrating to them when people take advantage of situations that are presented to them, and it's frustrating to us as a public. I think many, many more people are becoming aware of how carefully we all have to tread around those issues of access to personal information and who has it and what they use it for.

Certainly, there were great concerns, again, around the Overtime, and there were some equivalent episodes in Calgary around how that information was used and, I would say, abused and inappropriately. When people look to see, "Okay, then, what happens when that's the case?" we're not seeing any really positive forward movement on that, and this act is not giving us anything to reassure us that that leadership is in place and that, in fact, we have major changes in the way this is all dealt with.

So I'm very disappointed in this act. I'm very disappointed in the five years that it's taken us to get to this. It is very weak, Mr. Speaker, so I will not be supporting this in third reading.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) is available. Hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity, it's to participate in the debate; correct? Anyone under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Then I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The only way to combat the perception or charges of secrecy, cover-up, or partisanship is to be transparent and accountable. It is for this reason that an external civilian oversight committee must be established in order to ensure public confidence in Alberta's law enforcers and enforcement. It is unfortunate that the government did not incorporate our Liberal opposition amendments, which would have gone a long way to improving accountability. To quote a line from a well-known country song which summarizes Bill 36's inadequacy: "No-one knows what goes on behind closed doors."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Speaker: The question has been called. Any other participants?

Hon. Solicitor General, did you want to close the debate, or is everything fine?

Mr. Cenaiko: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 36 read a third time]

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

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

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

**Bill 42
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005**

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

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 42 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

3:50

Bill 41
Appropriation Act, 2005

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

Ms Blakeman: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to join in the debate in Committee of the Whole for Bill 41, the Appropriation Act, 2005. There were a couple of things I wanted to talk about at this stage. I do want to talk about some of the health provisions around smoking that would appear under Health and Wellness. I'd like to talk about some of the off-budget spending that is happening and what's being planned there. I also was very interested in the information that came to me from the Winspear fund, which I think is applicable to both the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports and the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment.

Let me start with the off-budget spending. Mr. Chairman, I've joked in the House that off-budget spending is sort of akin to off-track betting, but I really am concerned about what we're seeing here. Last year the budget was passed in the middle of May, and by the end of June there were huge amounts of money that were being rolled out that had not been contemplated in the budget. We thought: "Just a minute here. What the heck happened in the last six weeks that all of sudden they have these additional sums of money to be announcing? Why wasn't it in the budget a mere five weeks ago?" No answer from the government.

This time I don't even think we got the budget – well, we haven't completed debating the budget. We're talking about Committee of the Whole budget debate on the appropriation bill today. But for weeks we've been hearing the government muse out loud about all the possibilities for what they call off-budget spending, and I'm presuming what's happening there is that they're anticipating record surpluses rolling in and how they are going to divvy up the extra surplus that they get above and beyond the surpluses that are actually planned for in the budget. There are a number of problems around this. I have continued to express my concerns around management and planning processes that this government has.

Now, to be fair, they do have some good ones, and we are regarded across Canada and even in the U.S. as being ahead of the game on doing things like instituting performance measurements and tying business plans to that and to targets. We should be rightly proud of that. I maintain that we had a lot of good ideas that we never followed through on, and that whole accountability section is one of them in that we got the performance measurements, and then we really never went back and made sure that they were the right performance measurements, that they do what we need them to do, that they're outcome based, that they're measuring the information that truly is useful for us to make management decisions about, whether we keep doing what we're doing or change it.

So when I look at a budget that anticipates from the beginning and builds in that it's going to have a surplus, I have to ask questions because you say, "Shouldn't you be budgeting for a zero-based budget where all the money that you reasonably expect to come in,

you reasonably expect to spend or to put in a savings account of some kind if you want to be saving for something particularly special in the future, which is perfectly reasonable, a good idea in many cases?" But what we're getting here is a dependence on that surplus now and an inability to allow people to really deal with the amount of money that they have.

Here's what happens. The department is asked how much they need. The department says, "We need X amount of money." Then they come back, and the government says: "Well, you can't have X amount. We'll give you T amount, which is less than you wanted, and you'll have to make do with that and just figure out how to make do with it." What gets lost, usually, is the monitoring and enforcement of whatever that particular ministry is doing.

Then towards the end of the year they get that special phone call that says: gee, it looks like oil is at \$100 a barrel now, and you're going to get some more money to spend. Well, at that point, a couple of months from the end of the year, there's not much that department can do. They needed to know that they could have had another full-time staff person on for 12 months, not the last two or three months. They can't bring that person on now. Have them do what? Put in a year's worth of work in three months? It's impossible. So they just didn't get that project happening as they should have.

But now they've got the money. What are they going to do with it? That kind of budgeting and monetary planning, all it does is encourage that – what did someone call it? – March madness, where everybody goes: "We've got this money; we've got to spend it now. Okay. Let's go and spend it on promotional material, on this, that, and the next thing, and buy computers." Everybody does it, trying to spend it on sort of hard versions of things, computers and equipment and things, so that they can save that money and not spend it in next year's budget and could supposedly transfer the money over to do what they really want to do. It's frankly just a dumb way to budget stuff.

I wouldn't believe that this government could take this one step further, but in fact they have. So now we have this off-budget spending. Before we've even passed the budget, ministers are out there discussing with people how much money might be forthcoming off-budget. Well, why are we bothering to do the budget at all, then, if that's what this is really about? How do you have any kind of control over everybody out there now promising that they're going to try and get this extra money directed into whatever their project is? It's a ridiculous way to do things, but a lot of people over there are doing it. I don't think it's acceptable; it wouldn't work if I were in government.

An Hon. Member: That's why you're not.

Ms Blakeman: Yeah. Well, next time, my friends.

So that's the remarks on the off-budget spending. I find it ridiculous. More to that, you know: how much more is this government knowing right now it's going to spend that is not in that budget, is not being reviewed by the people of the province, and there's been no opportunity for them to comment on it? And what kind of announcements are we going to get in a month or five weeks from now? Really, that's about transparency and accountability. Let's not call it anything else, Mr. Chairman.

I had wanted to note under the Health and Wellness budget around the initiatives to decrease smoking in public places – and we had quite a good private member's bill that came forward earlier in this spring sitting, which was then watered down by a government amendment, which basically neutered it. Very disappointing because it was actually quite a strong bill about no smoking in public places and in workplaces.

The reason we got into this was to protect workers where they work so that they were not exposed to a known health hazard, which was second-hand smoke. That all got watered down. Now we'll only protect a certain kind of workers that work in certain kinds of places, and we won't protect other kinds of workers. No one has been able to justify for me why it's okay to discriminate against certain kinds of workers and expose them to health hazards. Nobody over there has been able to give me a good argument as to why they're doing that, but they're doing it.

I did want to acknowledge that there are some people that are trying. There's a fellow that has a tavern in Cold Lake, and he is volunteering to go nonsmoking in his tavern, which is in fact one of the special designated groups that got protected by the government in order to continue to expose their workers to health hazards. Those were drinking establishments, casinos, and bingo halls. So this fellow is taking the courageous step of saying: no, I want to protect my workers, and I want all my workers to be protected. He is going to take his tavern nonsmoking. Now, I wish I could remember his last name. It is in Cold Lake. His first name is Mark, I believe. I'd seen I think a newspaper article from maybe up in the local newspaper. I think he deserves credit and recognition in this Assembly for taking the step that the government was too scared to take themselves. I don't know who they thought they were protecting. It certainly wasn't the workers. This fellow, Mark, is protecting people, and he deserves the credit for doing that.

4:00

I'd like to go on and look at some of the issues that have been raised by the Winspear Foundation special fund. They did a report, which was released on October 25, 2004, *An Analysis of the Winspear Foundation Special Fund: 1997-2003*, prepared by Ann Goldblatt. The project team was Ann Goldblatt and Leanne MacMillan. Of course, everyone in here is no doubt familiar with the Winspears of Edmonton and all that they have brought to our city and, in fact, our province. Mrs. Harriet Winspear still lives in my constituency, I'm pleased to say.

There is a family foundation, and one of the programs inside of that foundation is this emergency fund. It is really set up for small grants of money to people that need it for emergency purposes. They wanted to look at who it was that was accessing this money. There had been some demand for it. The fund is to provide one-time gifts "for people who [are] working hard to help themselves, but whose social circumstances [result in] a need for financial assistance." These are often very immediate needs that government programs used to respond to or could respond to but aren't responding to right now. Either they're not responding, they can't respond fast enough, or they can't meet the requirements of what the person needs exactly. So people can apply to this Winspear fund, and indeed some of the social service agencies will refer people directly there for assistance.

Now, the analysis that was done was very interesting. It's indicating that 58 per cent of the fund allocations went to households with children, 48 per cent to single-parent family households, and 44 per cent to homes that were female led. They note that single-parent families led by women appear to be particularly vulnerable. Often there are children at risk here or children whose needs can't be met and not through the fault of a parent not trying really hard.

Information, in fact, was provided to the previous Minister of Human Resources and Employment in 2001 and in 2002, but this report that was, again, released in the fall of 2004 notes that even though Alberta's economy is prospering, emergency needs continue to grow. And what do they look at? They look at the rise in rents, in utility costs, increasing populations, increasing single-parent

families, and lack of affordable housing. One of the issues that the analysis raises in particular – and I know this will be of interest to the Minister of Health and Wellness and I hope to the Minister of Children's Services – is the very, very limited resources that are available to women and children that are leaving situations of violence and abuse. As we all know, they often have to leave on very short notice.

I remember that a woman in the States used to do a seminar. It had a pretty immediate effect on helping people to understand what it was like because she would have everyone in the seminar take off their shoes and leave them underneath the table and take out all their wallets and credit cards, even ID, and leave it all on the table. Then she would make everybody in the room get up and go to another room. So now they were in there without their shoes and without any identity, without any credit cards, without any money, without any car keys, without any house keys. They had nothing.

She would then say to them that, okay, this is what it's like for women and their children leaving abusive situations. You could be out on the street without your shoes, no house keys, no car keys, no ID, no nothing except for, if you're lucky, the clothes on your back, and you may be out there in your nightie. That's when you go, and you take off from there. So you don't have your toothbrush, you don't have the kids' toys, you don't have their favourite blankie, you don't have the book or the magazine that you were reading, and you don't have your clothes, as a woman. So a very tough situation to be in.

Many people know how frustrating it is when you lose your wallet or your wallet is stolen. Trying to get that ID back is darn difficult. Just imagine trying to do that as you are there with no shoes on, you know, literally, and trying to convince people that you now should be able to get ID to be able to carry on when you have no other way of proving who you are or where you've come from. You don't really want anybody to start going back to that old address and asking questions because, in fact, you're trying to hide from that person. You don't have your car to get around with anymore, so you're trying to do all this on a bus and go from office to office to office on the bus to get new ID.

This is one of the points I've raised in this House, others have raised in this House, and here is this special emergency fund, the Winspear fund, raising these issues as well. They're noting that they are seeing increasing numbers of requests for assistance from women who are fleeing domestic abuse situations.

We know how much this costs the system. We have finally figured out that abuse against women and children costs the system money. It does. It shows up in the department of health. It shows up in education. It shows up in human resources. It shows up in employment. It can show up in the corrections facilities. It can show up in the courts. It shows up in community services. It costs us a lot of money.

They are encouraging governments on all three levels to expand the relevant programs and to actively seek additional ways to work closely with the nonprofit sector to address these important needs. I just thought that was really interesting, that we would now end up with a philanthropic foundation coming back to the government and going: "Ah, excuse me. This is what we're seeing. We're noting something. We're out there on the front lines, and this is who is coming to us, decent hard-working people who shouldn't need to come to us for that kind of assistance." That programming really should be available through the government, and for reasons of narrow definitions and lack of funding and whatever other reasons the government has put in place, it's not available to them.

I've often talked about the social determinants of health, and I think one of the areas that most needs the government's immediate

attention is housing and housing on a number of different levels. We still need more shelter spaces. We live in a country where people die when they fall asleep outside in the winter. It's cruel. We need to be able to provide some kind of emergency shelter to everyone that needs it. So that's the, sort of, mat program, m-a-t, which is emergency shelters.

But mostly what we need is the transitional housing. There's short-term transitional, which is, you know, the three weeks to the three months, and then we need longer term transitional, which is the three months to the one year. If we're really trying to move people from one situation and get them into a life where they won't ever come back here again, then we need to give them that longer term support. It's cheaper for us to do that than to keep recycling them back into the system.

Who would be in that kind of situation? Well, you've just heard me talk about women and children leaving abusive situations, but it's also about people recovering from addictions. We've had so much discussion of crystal meth in here this spring session, mostly around youth. That was good, and I'm glad we did talk about it. But we also have older people that are addicted to it. Now, if you had someone that genuinely wanted to get off of that and get out of that addiction and create a new life for themselves, well, they too have also gotten rid of all of their ID, figuratively, and they're going to have to start over. How do they bridge from that unhealthy lifestyle that they've been in for who knows how many years? If it wasn't a drug addiction, maybe it was alcohol or gambling. How do they bridge from that unhealthy, bad lifestyle into the positive, new lifestyle that they need to get out of the system and stay out of the system forever? A big part of that is transitional housing.

4:10

Beyond that, we need what's called social housing or affordable housing, social housing being when the government is subsidizing part of it, affordable housing being when they're not. Basically, it's lower cost housing that people with lower and middle incomes can afford.

I hope that I get another opportunity to speak to this. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Last year this government spent almost \$2 billion of Alberta taxpayers' money beyond what it had originally budgeted, which set a dangerous lack of fiscal planning and responsibility precedent. Having had 34 years of practice, Albertans expect more from this government's ability to do its mathematical homework. The ad hoc, snip and dip, autopilot approach of this government is no longer acceptable to the majority of Alberta voters. Albertans are looking for visionary, sustainable policies that protect and advance their well-being, both physical and economic.

Last fall's election demonstrated that 53 per cent of Albertans who voted were looking elsewhere for leadership. That's the leadership we're prepared to provide.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's interesting, this particular budget of \$26 billion and the government touting all the wonderful things that they're doing. It seems to me that what there's an attempt to do is to undo the mistakes of the past.

Clearly, in the balance of things, when we're talking about

deficits, we're talking about three deficits. There was a preoccupation in the mid-90s with the economic deficit. Yes, you have to worry about that. At the same time, you have to worry about the human deficit. At the same time, you have to worry about the infrastructure deficit and to try to find a balance between these things.

Now the government comes back after the election and says: "Aren't we wonderful? We're putting all this extra money into things like education, into human resources, into health care." The point that one should make, Mr. Chairman, is that we had to. There was no option because they'd fallen behind so far before then.

Mr. Chairman, the idea that everybody in Alberta – sure, we have a boom economy. We're fortunate to have oil and gas revenues here. Contrary to the feeling that runs around here, it wasn't even the minister of infrastructure that put the oil and gas in the ground.

Dr. Oberg: Yes, it was. Yes, it was.

Mr. Martin: Oh, I'm sorry. I've lost my head. It was him.

Anyhow, Mr. Chairman, the point is that even in a wealthy province we have people falling below and our education falling below the poverty line.

I just want to speak very briefly, Mr. Chairman, about a meeting that was held on Sunday here in Edmonton. The Greater Edmonton Alliance met. There were over a thousand people at the Shaw centre, and they met because they're finding problems in the greater Edmonton area. The so-called Alberta advantage: they're finding more and more people that aren't sharing in that Alberta advantage.

It's an organization of churches, both the Catholic church and the Protestant church, a number of unions, a number of other groups that represent various people that perhaps are not sharing in the Alberta advantage. If you listen to them – and these are church people and others that see what's going on – they have a lot of compelling stories about more and more people falling beneath the cracks.

Now, one of them had to do with housing, Mr. Chairman. We had people talk about that. Others had to do with fair labour laws. Another was a very compelling story that people would hear about a child that was on crystal meth, that we've had this discussion in the media. What they've done is form this Greater Edmonton Alliance so they can speak with a stronger voice for those people that sometimes can't speak for themselves. Their goal is to lobby all governments – civic, provincial, and federal – and I'm sure we're going to hear a lot more of them. The point that I make is that even with the budget that we talked about that needed to flow into education and health care and others, there are a lot of people, a growing number at least in the greater Edmonton area, that are not sharing in that Alberta advantage. We still have a lot of work to do, so we can't sit around and clap ourselves on the back and say that everything's wonderful here – the greatest economy in the world, the greatest this in the world, the greatest that in the world – because it's not relevant to a number of people.

The other part of the deficit. We've had to put some money into the human deficit. Not enough. Even AISH, if we look at the increases there – and we're glad that they're coming – we find out that even there, though, people aren't as well off as they were in 1993 in this rich province, the most vulnerable people. The seniors, many of them are not back to where they were in '93 even though there is some improvement. I guess we should be thankful whenever there's improvement. The point I want to make very clearly before this government congratulates itself on the extra money that they put in is that there are still a lot of people falling through the cracks in this so-called rich province, Mr. Chairman.

The other problem that we have and they're touting now is an

infrastructure budget that's finally coming forward. Well, again, we're glad that there is some money coming for Infrastructure and Transportation, Mr. Chairman, but in the meantime we're preoccupied with the economic deficit, and more and more people are falling through the cracks, and our educational system is in desperate need of money. We were told that it wasn't until just before the election and after the teachers' strike. Finally some money is coming back in. We've had crumbling buildings and bridges and roads throughout this province. We've stopped investing in our infrastructure deficit. Now we're playing catch-up a bit, but we've got a long way to go, especially in the school area, something that I know something about.

If you look at the schools in Edmonton – and I expect it's somewhat true in Calgary; I can't say – almost 50 per cent of our schools are 50 years of age or older now. There's a lot of maintenance that we haven't kept up with in those schools. So we have the case where structural money is going into maintenance, as the member was talking about. So we have a lot of problems to catch up with our deficit in terms of our infrastructure, Mr. Chairman.

For those people looking for the quick fix, the P3s, everywhere that it's been tried, the government may try to shift and say that this P3 is just wonderful, works so well. It's not a quick fix. It doesn't matter whether you owe them money and you do it in Henday for 30 years where you're going to pay \$32 million to these private developers. That still is a debt; you still have to pay for it. To think that that's a quick fix, that that's going to solve our infrastructure problems is ludicrous. That's the point that I'm trying to make.

Now, this budget is not the worst one I've seen come through this Assembly because they have reinvested at least to some degree in infrastructure, to some degree in education and health care and the things that people need. But we're playing catch-up, Mr. Chairman. That's a problem. So is this hit-and-miss idea of budgeting. You know, before an election or just after we'll put money in, and then all of a sudden we have a fiscal crisis, and away we go, and then we have to cut back. This yin-yang sort of budgeting doesn't work. It has to be sustainable, and it has to be over a period of years.

The only other thing I'd like to comment on, Mr. Chairman, is that looking into the future, yes, we are fortunate with our oil and gas revenues and the high price of oil and gas as a world commodity. We don't know what the future holds. One of the things that I believe Premier Lougheed did was have a vision that when that happened, we'd have a heritage trust fund that could be used – I think the term was “for a rainy day.”

Well, Mr. Chairman, it's just been sitting there. It's just been sitting there while all this wealth is coming in. It seems to me that we have to reinvent the dream of Premier Lougheed and start to put some money back in that trust fund for the future. We don't know how long this ride is going to go. I think that many people opposite think that this will go on forever. We should learn from the past that it's not going to go on forever.

4:20

Mr. Chairman, it's a balance, as I say. I've seen worse budgets come through this Legislature. This is catch up, but if the government, before they tire themselves patting themselves on the back, recognize that they created these problems – the fact is that there was not enough money for education in the past, there was not enough money in health care, and certainly our infrastructure has been allowed to fall apart in the last number of years. This to me is unacceptable in a wealthy society.

So we have to find that balance again. We don't have the economic deficit now, but we have to find that balance between what we should put in the trust fund, what should go into our people

services, and how we upgrade our infrastructure. This year's budget is interesting. It'll be interesting to see where this government goes in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, the background noise is getting a little higher, and I would ask that we keep it down to a minimum, please.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to speak about a number of decisions made during the session. First of all, I would like to talk about Bill 29, the AISH amendment. Since 1993 AISH recipients have lost 23 per cent of their income to inflation. This amendment means a 15 per cent increase, and recipients are going to have to wait till next year to get that whole amount. This still falls far short of inflation.

Our election position was to raise AISH to \$1,050 immediately. This would make up for the losses due to inflation over the past 12 years, and then AISH should be indexed to the cost of living using a market-basket measure. That would ensure that the severally handicapped would be able to meet their needs on this program. The AISH amendment is a positive step but a small step. There should be annual reviews and adjustments as needed to help these individuals live a quality life.

Secondly, I have questions related to Children's Services. First, looking at child care, why are we delaying signing an agreement that would bring \$70 million to Alberta? What are the choices this government keeps saying we must have? How does the federal program oppose those choices? We need money to support child care workers through higher wages, benefits, and help with training so that we can attract and keep workers. Seventy million dollars will help, and our children deserve this.

Looking at youth shelters, we need predictable, sustainable funding so that staff can put energy into offering programs and services. We have to get beyond the tyranny of one-year funding decisions.

Finally, we need to take a serious look at our Children's Services structure and the workloads of our front-line workers and the lack of the support that they need.

I'm pleased to see the additional funding for police in Alberta, but urban areas need more attention. Community policing is essential as a tool to prevent problems. We need to put money in planning and to response and prevention, not just reaction.

I would like to see a commitment to arts by this government. The provincial government contribution is shamefully low. The fine arts do two important things, both of which are hard to measure. They feed the soul, which we desperately need in an increasingly secular world, and they make us more creative. Even with all our advances in technology, we still and will always need creative minds.

Long-term care deserves a review, as indicated by the Auditor General. We need standards that are provincial and are regulated to remove the fears of so many in this province and give them some peace of mind in terms of the care of their loved ones.

I would like to take the opportunity now to add some concerns regarding the Education budget. I spoke earlier about the need to provide adequate funding for education infrastructure. I also talked about the need to change the methods used to allocate funds to senior high schools. My colleagues have talked about the unfunded liability of the Alberta teachers' retirement fund as a growing, intergenerational, unproductive debt. This is another issue that needs to be addressed seriously because it is the right thing to do.

Mr. R. Miller: It's going to be \$45 billion by the year 2025.

Mrs. Mather: Forty-five billion? Well, it's outrageous, and it's just unacceptable.

I'd like to look at some other areas, and the first is special needs. To ensure adequate programming for special-needs students, we need more funds. Amounts now allocated do not cover the cost of a full-time aide that some need. They do meet the school's cost to provide the programming ratios necessary to ensure that those with learning deficits can be brought up to speed, and they do not allow for the collaboration time and preparation time necessary to ensure teachers' ability to provide the highest level of assessment practices or to prepare material that will challenge students on higher order thinking skills. The special needs area includes the most disadvantaged, and it is not adequately funded.

Head Start early childhood programs should be strongly encouraged for families who need support to ensure that the next generation has an equal starting place when they hit kindergarten. We have seen six year olds in grade 1 who are already two years behind their peers before they even get out of the blocks. This can be prevented through participation in quality programs and result in ultimately saving dollars that are required now for remediation.

Another area that I'd like to mention is counsellors. We have lost trained counsellors along with librarians and speech therapists because the jobs were cut. University students who might have gone into these fields chose other careers in the hope that they'd have a job. Now we're saying that we need to find more counsellors, we need to find social workers, and we need to find speech therapists.

There needs to be a formula for student-counsellor ratio in place. With the limited resources of child welfare, or Children's Services, there are a lot of families and students that are falling through the cracks and who are not able to meet the demands in the school properly. I think something really tragic will have to happen before we look at this, which will be sad because it will mean that somebody is going to be hurt. The child welfare restructuring of programs is now making things harder for families to access health, and schools do not have the resources to help.

Thirdly, I'd like to just mention the role of the principal. Principals are teachers first. The relationship between teacher and principal is built upon trust, integrity, and moral purpose. The goals and outcomes are the same for teachers and principals: to improve student achievement. If you wish for collaboration, continued growth of professional learning communities, and positive interaction between teachers and unions and principals, then leave principals in the same bargaining unit.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that we need a plan for our surplus revenues. A plan with vision, a vision that embraces every Albertan and recognizes all the potentials that each one has.

Thank you.

Ms Blakeman: I'm glad to get this second opportunity to speak. I just wanted to finish off some of the points that were raised by this Winspear Foundation special fund report and analysis. Specifically, they were pointing out that social assistance and AISH rates and even minimum wage are not and have not kept pace with cost increases, and that really affects people's ability to pay their rent, their utilities, transportation, medication, food, child care, school supplies and fees, and adult learning, training, and fees.

So we have seen an increase in the AISH rates. We did not see an accompanying increase in the Alberta Works rates. At some point in time we're eventually going to see the promised increase in the minimum wage, but I'm not sure when that is. So even though we recognize and the government seems to have recognized that this

increase is needed, there's now very slow implementation of it. Even the AISH increase is implemented over time, and certainly the inclination has been that the minimum wage will be incremental as well.

4:30

A second point that this group is making is around rent and damage deposits, and we've heard that one before in connection with women fleeing abusive situations. It's just such a huge amount of money that you need to have up front because most places ask for the first month's rent plus an equivalent amount often for the damage deposit. So, you know, a \$600 rent, which isn't going to get you much, plus \$600 damage deposit: you're looking at \$1,200 up front. That's a lot of money to produce out of nowhere if you don't have any money or you're on social assistance in some way. There was special dispensation through social assistance at one point in recognition of women fleeing abusive situations, but you had to know about it and go through it and ask for it. Frankly, at this point I'm not sure if the program still exists.

What's being noted in this report is that when people can't pay their rent, of course, they get evicted, and often because they can't get that amount of money up front, they are homeless. That's particularly difficult if there are children with them. So they're suggesting that "people need access to a payment structure that could be spread over time," potentially some kind of a "rent bank," they term it, from which they could borrow money at a minimal interest and then repay it over a period of time. At least it would help them get into another accommodation.

I've already talked about access to affordable housing. We seem to have gone through the worst of what happened when both the electricity and the gas utilities increased at such a phenomenal rate and the huge effect that that had on people who are vulnerable and struggling and working low income. That problem is still out there although it's not being experienced anew now. They just have to deal with these quite large utility payments that weren't there before.

We find that particularly vulnerable are seniors and children, mostly because they're less able to cope with cold living accommodations. It's just a pretty miserable existence, and adults seem to be able to cope a bit better with it. But for kids and seniors it makes their lives quite miserable if they're in a place that isn't heated very well or they can't afford to keep the temperature up.

I'll make the argument again, as they do make it in this study, that telephones are not a frill. Especially for those families that have children, telephones are necessary for emergency services. They are absolutely tied to employment. So there you've got health and employment; it's necessary for those two things. Also for any seniors that are on those medic alerts, those work through the telephone line. You have to have a telephone to get it. Again that's related to health, but it's certainly not a frill for any of those. So we need to stop thinking of telephones as being an extra and start to look in all of the social programs at incorporating that cost and understanding that it's a necessity.

This analysis talks about bridge funding between programs. They talk about training fees for people, medical expenses and coverage, caring for children with disabilities and chronic illnesses. They single out the importance of child care as a need for single parents faced with a medical situation; for example, if we have a mom giving birth and she already has other kids, she needs child care for those other children. Or if she's receiving some kind of medical treatment, chemotherapy or dialysis or anything else in which you regularly need to be going into the hospital or going into a clinic for some kind of treatment, you've got to have your kids looked after. If you don't, then we call you an unfit mother and we take your children away and make them wards of the state.

Most people really want to keep their families together, and we supposedly want them to keep their families together, but we create situations that make it very difficult for them. This is an area where the government is not filling the gap here.

Another area which I've noticed for a long time is sponsorship breakdown, and those are absolutely heartbreaking. We need to strike a more fair balance because I don't think I'd find many people passing by on the street that would happily say: "Absolutely. Move here and bring all your relatives, and we'll put all of them on social assistance and pay for all of them." That's not what we expect. But where you do have a sponsorship breakdown – and it's not that frequent. I mean, for many people sponsoring their family is a point of great honour and even prestige. They take those commitments seriously, and they fulfill them. But sponsorships do breakdown, and when they do, we've got very hard and fast rules here.

I've had elderly couples whose children have walked away from sponsorships of them, and they could not get any assistance. They were specifically prohibited from getting any assistance. It was a very tough time because all I could do was send them back to friends and try and embarrass the adult children to try and come through with some kind of support for them. It was sickening that we would have people in our country that were in that kind of shape, and they didn't even have the wherewithal and resources to go back. They were just stuck here with no means of support and no access to programs. So we have a gap there as well.

The school fee situation. I often hear members of the government go: oh, well, if they just go and explain it to the principal, you know, that'll all be dealt with. That may not be possible. They might be from a community that doesn't easily interact with authority figures, which they would see a principal of a school as being, or there is a prohibition against asking for assistance. There are lots of reasons why people would be very reluctant to go and admit that. Aside from that, why are we charging school fees to people anyway, that we would be expecting people in strained financial situations to be coming up with that kind of money? And means testing is really unacceptable, I think.

I found this a very interesting report. I highly recommend it. A number of ministries need to be taking a look here. This is a respected foundation with very thoughtful people giving advice to it. They, in turn, have offered very thoughtful advice to the government. I was very interested to see that their advice is reflecting the advice that's coming out of the Social Planning Council. My experiences are reflecting what they're talking about. It's reflected in the social determinates of health. You're hearing it over and over and over again, yet I'm finding the government very resistant to moving on any of this.

I still feel it's worthwhile bringing it up and trying again. There are new ministers in different departments. Maybe they will hear me. Working on the Member for Edmonton-Centre's theory of 500 times and I get something out of the government, I'm willing to raise it again in the hopes of influencing them that way.

This is a very wealthy province, and we have money to invest. I think that if we want to look at the evidence – for example, ensuring that children are successful before they get into school – a dollar invested in a program that gets a kid into a successful position ready to start school on an even par with any of their colleagues saves us \$7 down the line.

I've never had enough money ahead to be able to invest in anything, but I'm sure others in this Assembly do. Boy, if you were told there's an investment opportunity where you gave your broker a thousand dollars and they would come back to you with \$7,000, you'd all be in there like flint. Why are we not doing that same thing when that investment is around children? A dollar invested in

a child, getting them up to speed and equivalent to their colleagues by age six, pays off with \$7 for us further down the line, either \$7 worth of productivity in tax paying or it costs us \$7 in corrections and health and education and social assistance programs and all of those other things.

I think sometimes the government's ideology trips them up as far as offering efficient programs and wise investments. Sometimes I feel that it's my job to get up and give you a bit of a shake and say: look at the evidence, and make the decisions based on that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

4:40

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

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Before I launch into a number of comments on Bill 41, I would just like to acknowledge the loss and the trauma suffered by the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul and his family and all the other families in the condominium fire the other day. A number of members of this Legislature were treated to a media day at the Edmonton firefighters' Poundmaker training centre on Friday. It certainly gave myself and those of us that were present a tremendous appreciation for the work done by not only the firefighters in Edmonton but across North America and around the world, I would imagine. I just wanted to acknowledge the fact that there has been a loss suffered by a member of this Assembly, and we're thinking of that member and hope that all is going well.

Mr. Chairman, having the opportunity to speak to Bill 41 in committee gives me a chance to raise a couple of ideas that I wasn't able to raise last night, when we spoke to this bill in second reading. They're not major issues. They're little things that wouldn't necessarily have involved an awful lot of expenditure on behalf of the various departments yet at the same time might well have had a very positive impact on the citizens of this province. They're coming to me through motions other than government motions. We're all cognizant of the fact that the spring sitting is very quickly winding down, and these motions are far down the list, and they're not likely to be debated. In fact, almost for sure they're not going to be debated. So it gave me pause to reflect on those motions and how they might have impacted all citizens of this province.

The first one that I'm going to address, Mr. Chairman, would have come under the education budget. Motion 544, which would have been brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Nose Hill, would have urged the government to "consider strategies to increase the number of students who successfully complete the requirements for high school graduation." Certainly, throughout this spring sitting of the Legislature and throughout the budget debates there was an awful lot of discussion by the opposition as to the fact that in Alberta we have one of the lowest, or perhaps even the lowest, three-year graduation rate in the country. Given the tremendous wealth in this province and the fact that we trumpet the Alberta advantage, it's disturbing, indeed, to see that so many students are choosing for one reason or another not to finish their high school education.

I know that the hon. Education minister has added some funding to that department, and we're appreciative of that. I'm not aware of any particular strategy or any particular program that's designed to increase that three-year graduation rate. I really think that we're missing the boat if we don't particularly zero in on that issue and really concentrate an awful lot of effort and energy into improving the three-year graduation rate. In English as a Second Language, for example, 75 per cent drop out of high school, so only a 25 per cent completion rate. Again, those numbers are appalling, given the wealth in this province.

Another one that I'd like to highlight, Mr. Chairman, would have been Motion 560, which would have been brought forward by the Member for Red Deer-North. This one would have asked the government to "consider the advisability of implementing a \$6,000 annual tax exemption per child in a family as a means of lowering the tax burden for parents." Again, I've indicated in previous debate that, unfortunately, the budget really does not do an awful lot in the way of providing meaningful tax relief for Albertans, especially lower income Albertans. Obviously, just based on looking at that motion, I really don't know what the financial impact on the government would have been, but I suspect it wouldn't have been a major hit, as it were, and at the same time certainly would have provided some very much-needed relief for families with children and particularly, again, low-income families.

Now, here's one that I'm really passionate about. I see that the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky would have brought this one forward. It's Motion 570, which would have asked the government – and I believe this would have been under Community Development – "to review the feasibility and practicality of reinstating roadside provincial campsites in an effort to promote Alberta's natural landscapes as well as attract Canadian and international motoring travellers."

Well, Mr. Chairman, in my youth, growing up in a family that very much appreciated and enjoyed the outdoors and particularly Alberta's outdoors, I was fortunate enough to have parents who made it their mission to have the family out of Edmonton, out of the city and into the countryside, every weekend from the Easter weekend all the way through to the Thanksgiving weekend. We had one of the very first motorhomes on the road in Alberta. In fact, we still have pictures of it. It looked more like an apple crate. It was pretty square with only a few windows, but it had all of the amenities. My parents made a point of making sure that we travelled across the province every single weekend, as I said, between somewhere around the end of March right through to the middle of October.

Now, several years ago, of course, those roadside campgrounds were discontinued. Ostensibly it was, I think, both a budgetary consideration – there was, obviously, some nominal cost in terms of having roadside campgrounds – but also, Mr. Chairman, there was discussion of the fact that we wanted to promote the private campground industry and it was felt that the public roadside campgrounds were taking away from that. Unfortunately, it's been my observation over the years as someone who has tried to carry on the traditions that my family had developed – and I try to get my family out of the city and around the province to enjoy this wealth of nature that we have – that even the provincial parks are pretty much priced out of the range of most families. You're talking quite often in the area of \$25 to \$30 a night for a basic campground.

This has really made it almost unaffordable for many families again, especially the lower income families who at one time would have looked at camping opportunities and particularly the roadside campgrounds as a very reasonable and feasible alternative to an expensive holiday. The fact that that option is no longer there, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest is a shame because it really is taking away from the opportunity for parents and children to take full advantage of the opportunities that we have in this province in terms of tourism, getting around and seeing the various sights and enjoying nature at its best.

Certainly, there's been a lot of talk this afternoon about drugs and about police and about youth, and crystal meth has come up again in the debates this afternoon.

Ms Blakeman: Alcohol, gambling.

Mr. R. Miller: Alcohol and gambling.

Mr. Chairman, I often credit the fact that myself and my siblings turned out reasonably well to the fact that we had parents that made an effort to not only get us out of the city but to share with us the bounty of this province and expand our opportunities to recreate in this province. I think anything we can do to encourage other families to do the same and make it more likely that they will do the same is something that we should be looking at. So I would applaud the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for that motion. Unfortunately, we won't have the chance to debate it in this spring sitting, but hopefully it will come back at another point.

4:50

Mr. Chairman, going back to the Finance department, with Motion 584, which happens to have been a motion that is under the name of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, we would have asked the Legislature to consider improving "the quality of life for Albertans earning less than \$29,000 annually by reducing personal income tax rates from 10 per cent to 9 per cent." Again I think this would just simply have been a recognition of the fact that the flat tax is a regressive tax. It punishes low-income earners and low-income families unnecessarily, unduly, and unfairly, and I think it very much would have gone a long way toward improving the quality of life for some of those lower income earners if we had had a chance to debate that.

Another one that I'm quite passionate about and that I think would have been a very interesting debate because there are good arguments on both sides – I'm not sure if it would have been Finance or Community Development. Motion 588, a motion that was proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Manning, would have seen us debate the merits of providing "a tax credit to parents or guardians for out-of-pocket costs related to their children's organized, extra-curricular, physical, or cultural activities."

Mr. Chairman, again there's been a fair amount of discussion in the spring sitting about youth and the dangers that society presents to them and particularly crystal meth but certainly drugs in general and gambling and smoking. Here is what I would have thought would have been a great way to encourage more children to be kept busy. I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie this afternoon in his member's statement referred to youth crime and the fact that we have to keep our children busy. Here would have been one way that we could have encouraged families to have their children more involved in extracurricular activities.

I remember that several years ago now I had a superintendent from the Edmonton Police Service speak to my Rotary club about youth crime in south Edmonton. He had two things to say, and they're both worth repeating. The first was that he said he could step inside any home in Edmonton that has children and within only a matter of seconds tell you whether or not those kids are going to be in trouble. His methodology was that if there were books present, that was a very good sign, and it was most likely that those kids would not be led astray. Just the simple fact that a family that reads leads to a healthy family situation.

His second point was: don't let the kids hang at the mall. Keep them busy, whether it be swimming or baseball or hockey or piano lessons or art lessons or a drama class or a debate club. You name it, Mr. Chairman. The idea was to do everything possible to keep the children busy and not allow them to hang at the mall, not give them time to fall into the wrong crowd. It certainly requires a little more effort and participation on behalf of the parents to do that, and

it's not always possible for parents and certainly not always financially possible for parents to have their children involved in these extracurricular activities.

I think that would have been an interesting debate. Some people have suggested that by doing so you're really only giving an advantage to those parents that can already afford to put their children in extracurricular activities. So there is some argument on the other side of that debate, but again I think anything we can do to provide our children with opportunities to help them grow into well-rounded adults and thereby provide the community with contributing members and keep crime rates down and all of those things, Mr. Chairman, would have been a good thing, and I'm sorry to see that we're not going to have the opportunity to debate that particular motion.

I guess the last thing I would like to mention is the health care premium tax. I didn't mention it in my comments last night, and it would be wrong for me not to since it was obviously a big part of the Liberal opposition's campaign during the last election in the fall of 2004. This is something that would not really have cost an awful lot of money. In fact, it really wouldn't have cost any money at all because we all know, Mr. Chairman, that we have to pay for health care one way or the other, and the majority of that money right now is coming out of general revenue, out of our taxes anyway.

But the health care premium tax as it's now levied is definitely a burden on families, some \$1,000, \$1,200 – I can't remember what the number is – \$68 times 12, so it's well over \$1,000 per family per year. In some cases small business picks up that cost on behalf of the family. So it's not only a cost of some note to families but to small businesses as well. I think we could have given serious consideration to removing that tax and allowing the money to come entirely out of our taxes the way that many other provinces do. It would've ultimately, I think, been fairer, as I suggested, to both lower income families, lower income individual wage earners, and also small businesses.

So those would be my comments for this afternoon, Mr. Chairman, on Bill 41, and I look forward to further debate. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon Member for St. Albert.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to get up and make some comments on this particular section of the debate. First of all, I'd like to comment on the hospital care in St. Albert, especially for people dying under duress. I've had occasion in the last two weeks to be in the hospital in St. Albert quite a bit. I must compliment the nursing staff and doctors at our hospital in St. Albert and clearly say to the House, being a member of that constituency, how proud I am to have that hospital and how proud I am to know the dedicated staff of nurses, support staff, and doctors in that particular hospital.

I stand up also, Mr. Chair, with a concern. This morning I was called to have breakfast with a reporter. One of the ladies that I met during the campaign in St. Albert, her daughter was found in a drug house over the weekend. She has taken a downhill slide in her problem with drugs.

I leave this session somewhat – afraid would be the word because I'm not sure what we are going to do about this very serious crystal meth problem we have in my constituency. I'm concerned in the sense of the adequacy of AADAC to deliver a program. In my particular constituency we have very good prevention programs under the FCSS banner and also intervention programs. But I am concerned that we don't have an action plan for the treatment of our kids or people that come across this deadly drug, and that concerns

me greatly. By an action plan I mean adequate treatment, lodging, and support for these kinds of situations.

Also, I just realized today that the advocate's report came out. I didn't get a chance to look at it, but I would hope that the children's advocate is looking at this particular problem for delivery of service to children on drugs. I think this is very, very important.

I hope also that there is some movement to enhance, again, the DARE program at the elementary grade 6 level. I hope that people like Constable Moulds in St. Albert are recognized for their good work, and I hope the program is looked at in terms of looking at a new innovation in the curriculum to look at this particular plague that we have right now.

5:00

The other thing I'd like to talk about just before I sit down is our seniors in St. Albert. We have a tax base there that's very high and very difficult on seniors, and seniors are having difficulty with the whole business of utility rates. Lack of affordable housing for them is a major concern.

When I was out visiting at a constituency in the rural parts of Alberta last night, it was brought to me about the need for seniors' accommodation, where people in these accommodations and significant others that support them have access to an ombudsman type of function, where they can bring their concerns and have them addressed.

Ms Blakeman: Like the Liberals proposed.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, exactly. I think this is a big problem. I think this is very, very important, that we have that access to an ombudsman type of function.

I couldn't believe what I heard last night. In the home that we were talking about, one of the doors had fallen on one of the clients in the home and damaged the person, so as a result of that all the doors in this particular new institution were removed. Now people are having to utilize facilities, to go to the washroom, and their dignity is not respected. I am having a difficult time believing this, but I was told this is going on. So I would hope that there is some measure to accommodate an ongoing, 24-hour type of inspection.

Also, I believe that we've talked about whistle-blower legislation in the House, and I think it would behoove us to look at this because I think there are staff that have concerns about this kind of thing, would like to come forth and be able to talk about it. I think we have to make some accommodation for that.

Mr. Chairman, I'll sit down with that and close off. Thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 41 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 would move that the committee rise and report Bill 42, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2005, and Bill 41, the Appropriation Act, 2005.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 42 and Bill 41.

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. In light of the hour and in light of the state of the Order Paper I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 5:03 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]