



Racing Entertainment Centre Project

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Dr. Kevin Taft, Hon. Member from Edmonton-Riverview, Leader of the Official Opposition

March 19

Dr. Taft: Well, we'll see where the deals land between this cabinet or previous cabinets, this government and other governments.



This government did have full knowledge of the plans for the water transfer from the Red Deer River to Balzac last summer. In fact, the former Deputy Premier stated right here that there was "good interaction between a variety of ministries in this government," concerning the Balzac project, and on August 31 she stated that "a lot of work" had been done on the project, again right here in the Assembly. My question, then, to the Premier: what members of his government have been involved with the meetings with the developers on the Balzac project?

Mr. Stelmach: Since assuming the position of Premier, none – absolutely none – of the members of Executive Council have met with any developers.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I saw a replay of a famous prime ministerial debate just this weekend in which one person stood up and said, "I had no choice," and the other said, "Yes, you did have a choice." My question is to the Premier. Whether it's your current cabinet or not, you are responsible for the deals of this government. You are. I need you to answer for your whole government.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I'll look forward to the debate any time, anywhere. It doesn't matter the time of day. Any time.

Dr. Taft: You know, Mr. Speaker, the people of the Red Deer basin want some answers. They want answers on the water transfer for Balzac, and we're clearly not going to get them from the Premier, so let's try somebody else. In this Assembly last August the government made clear that a variety of ministries were involved in the development at Balzac. We already know that Agriculture is in for millions, so let's get the truth on some others. To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: what resources has his department committed to the project at Balzac?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, we've committed absolutely no resources to the project.

Alberta Hansard, March 19, 2007 (P. 189)



Racing Entertainment Centre Project (continued)

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Dr. Kevin Taft, Hon. Member from Edmonton-Riverview, Leader of the Official Opposition

March 19, 2007

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Balzac water transfer is a crucial test for this government's leadership on environmental issues, and we can see how they're doing so far.

Environmental issues don't respect municipal or county lines, and the impacts extend far beyond those. Building a truly sustainable Alberta requires tough choices that put political considerations aside. My question today is to the Minister of Environment. Given the minister's detailed knowledge of and support for the Balzac project, did this government review the memorandum of understanding between the MD and the developers before it was signed, or are they strictly hands off even when provincial water is at stake?

Mr. Renner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've answered this question in a number of forms before in the House. The process for applications and approvals of water licences is very straightforward. There currently is an application that is under consideration. To date no decisions have been made.

Dr. Taft: Again a total dodge.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's own backyard, figuratively speaking at least, is also the site of some pretty contentious projects with massive implications for the quality of life and environmental sustainability across a wide region. The area around Ryley is the site of a massive landfill project that may someday take in waste from around the continent, yet we have very limited support for regional planning. My question is to the Premier. What steps will the Premier take to ensure that the full array of regional issues is considered before further decisions on this massive project are made?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the Beaver regional waste management commission went through some of the most extensive public hearings ever in the province of Alberta with respect to the development. I can't even recall the hundreds of hours of evidence that were presented to various authorities, both to the public health authority, the appeal authorities. All evidence points out that this is the most natural bathtub there is in terms of protection of water. You know, there is waste generated. We have to put it someplace. Apparently, according to the experts, this is the best.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The commission that owns and operates the dump is hoping to win the right to bring in 500,000 tonnes of trash shipped by rail from Vancouver every year. If successful, they predict that their revenues, of course, will soar, but there are residents concerned about the long-term impacts of this. Again to the Premier: given this government's generous financial support for the Balzac project, can the Premier tell this Assembly if any provincial funds have been provided to support the development of the Ryley landfill project, and if so, how much?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this person has got up a number of times in this House and made allegations without support. You now have an opportunity to put on the table the millions of dollars that went to the Balzac support by the government. Present it now, or don't mention it in any preambles. There has got to be some decency in this House. There's immunity in this House, and he behaves like he doesn't know the rules.

Alberta Hansard, March 19, 2007 (P. 189)



Municipal Waste-water Infrastructure Assistance

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Dr. Kevin Taft, Hon. Member from Edmonton-Riverview, Leader of the Official Opposition

March 20, 2007

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier challenged me to provide evidence that this government has committed millions of dollars to the water transfer from the Red Deer River to the project at Balzac, so I will.

If the Premier checks page 18 of the supplementary supply estimates from just last August, he'll find a line that commits \$4.8 million "to support a project in the Municipal District of Rockyview that includes a horseracing track and an equine centre." This matter has been extensively debated in this Assembly and approved by a vote of this government over the objections of the opposition. To the Premier: will the Premier now admit that this government has approved millions in spending on this project?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the hon. leader kept talking about a secret deal. I said: present the evidence of a secret deal. The supplementary estimates were of course debated here in the House, and it's no secret. It's a matter of the record, and he finally found it.

Dr. Taft: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause] Prop him up, guys; prop him up.

To the Minister of Agriculture and Food: since this money is under the jurisdiction of his department, how much, if any, of this money does the department plan to spend?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. As the Premier said, I've been waiting for this question for quite some time. He just hasn't quite got down to me yet. This came out of a program that's designed for municipalities, and we've had this program for close to nine years now. It's designed to assist municipalities with costs for water and waste-water infrastructure. It's for new projects that benefit our economy and grow our agriculture processing industry. Only municipalities are eligible for this funding.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you. So let's focus in, then, on the specifics of the deal concerning the Balzac water transfer. Again to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. I will assume that there's more than just a verbal arrangement between the government and Rocky View on this one. Can the minister tell this Assembly and all Albertans: what are the terms of the deal under which this money will be spent?

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no specific terms of the deal. This is a program that we've had around for nine years, as I've said. They qualified for the program, so when they get their proper approvals, the money will be forwarded to them. At this particular time the money hasn't been forwarded to them because all the systems are not a go yet.

Alberta Hansard, March 20, 2007 (P.233)



Racing Entertainment Centre Project (March 20)

Question asked during Oral Question Period of the 26th Legislature of Alberta, 3rd Session from Dr. Kevin Taft, Hon. Member from Edmonton-Riverview, Leader of the Official Opposition

March 20, 2007

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A freedom of information request to the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation has informed us that there are 1,800 pages of documents relating to the Balzac water transfer in this department's files – 1,800 pages in one department.

None of those have been made available to us at this point, but they indicate that a lot of work has been undertaken by this government on this water transfer.

To the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation: given the intense public interest in this issue, will the minister make the 1,800 pages of the documents public, or does he intend for them to remain secret?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I don't know anything about the 1,800 pages. I do know that there have been some applications for water that my predecessor had actually rejected and said that they didn't meet the criteria.

I don't know exactly why the person that runs FOIP in the department wouldn't – if there is some reason that we cannot give the information out because it implicates a third party that wants to say, "We don't want that information out there," that's up to whatever the rules are in FOIP on whether or not they give out those.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suggest that the minister does his homework a little more extensively. Thank you.

A simple, straightforward question to the minister: exactly what has been done by the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation on the water transfer to Balzac?

Mr. Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, as I stated yesterday, as far as I know, there have been no deals done. I know that we had an application from the MD of Rocky View. It didn't meet the criteria, and it was turned down. Other stuff that was done, I will tell you – I shouldn't say that; I do know of another thing that happened. Ivanhoe Cambridge has been working with our department on whether or not they can have access into the property. Our department is doing their due diligence and making sure that all safety is adhered to. They're talking about interchanges and things like that, and the experts in our department have to do their due diligence and see whether or not it can be done.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time to the Minister of Environment. Please just answer the question. Given the minister's detailed knowledge of and support for the project at Balzac, did this government review the memorandum of agreement between the MD of Rocky View and the developers before it was signed?

Mr. Renner: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated many times before, the responsibility for reviewing the information is borne by officials within my department. I expect my officials to review all relevant information before they come up with a final recommendation, which has not taken place at this point.

Alberta Hansard, March 20, 2007 (P.233-234)