The hon. Minister for Health and Wellness,

followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Evans: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege to get up today and defend the supplementary estimates of the Department of Health and Wellness. At the outset I want to remind the hon. member opposite from Edmonton-Rutherford, who spoke about the expenses, that in the introduction of the bill yesterday, the Minister of Finance clearly illuminated why the interim supply estimates were as high as they were. Although the hon. member opposite made

much comment about the $2,044,200,000 for expense and equipment and inventory purchases, by definition this expense includes “salaries, supplies, grants, amortization of capital assets and debt servicing costs.” In short, Health employs just less than a hundred thousand employees, and for two months this amount helps run the health system, for April and May. So an extraordinary wild cost?

No, of course not. It is the responsible governance and payment through the regional health authorities for the salaries of people that serve the patients of this province.

Now, Mr. Chairman, in terms of the supplementary estimates that are being debated, I will comment later, but that I think was a reference point and a suggestion as well that we should be discussing how much would be spent on this year's international symposium.

I'd like to remind the hon. member opposite that although it was not a budgeted amount for this year's budget, we are doing our best within the resources available in the administration of the Department of Health and Wellness to provide supports for the symposium, to make sure that we have provided monies for those 500-some-odd people that will attend. They will represent every stakeholder group in the health-related field, from opticians to ophthalmologists, physicians, nurses, licensed practical nurses, regional health authorities. The members of the opposition have been invited to attend as well.

Mr. Chairman, although I'm aware that this attendance might run into conflict with activities in this House, clearly it is being arranged to be primarily convenient for those members of the public, including physicians, who will evaluate the effectiveness of those treatments. So, quite honestly, the best practices that will be displayed have been very carefully selected, and we are managing that symposium as parsimoniously as possible. It will be located in Calgary at the Westin. The costs that I've seen that have been advanced thus far are frugal indeed. I'm not able now to report what the totals will be, but I will report at some time later.

Mr. Chairman, another reference point from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was that the minister, if I refer to the Blues, was quite comfortable with expenditures that were made by a private provider for health care service. Those were not words that I stated.

I said that evaluation of that had not come forward. What I am comfortable about and what I can assure this Assembly my comfort relative to is that 500 people who had pain and suffering,

who had endured long waiting lists – we were able to alleviate their discomfort by giving them an opportunity to advance their surgery in a fashion that made sure that they were attended to. From many of those people I have had either verbal comment or comments from people within the city of Calgary who are family members associated with those particular patients who have said that that was the best thing that happened because it gave them an opportunity to go back to work.

Mr. Chairman, I don't think there's more to be said on this interim supply amount to be voted, but this particular reference point is for management of the health care system. At some point later when you want to speak about additional operating and capital funding for the years 2004-05, I will identify how we expended the additional funding of $350 million provided to the health authorities to defer or defray their accumulated deficits and provide additional operating funding to enable them to advance the cause on waiting lists.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.